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Introduction

There has been a polemic going on that the Qur'an does not have manuscripts from the first century of *hijra*. However, this is not true. Many fragments of early Qur'anic manuscripts were shown by Orientalists notably Nabia Abbott in her work *The Rise of the North Arabic script and its Kur'anic development, with a full description of the Kur'an manuscripts in the Oriental Institute* (1939, University of Chicago Press). There she discusses some of the Quranic manuscripts, dated from second half of the first century *hijra* onwards, at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. The aim of this page is to highlight some of the early Qur'anic manuscripts to refute the claim that the Qur'an lacks manuscripts from the first century of *hijra*.

The dig at the Great Mosque in Ṣan'a', Yemen, had found a large number of manuscripts of the Qur'an dating from first century of *hijra*. The date of building the Great Mosque in Ṣan’a’ goes back to 6th year of *hijra* when the Prophet Muhammad entrusted one of his companions to build a mosque. The mosque was extended and enlarged by Islamic rulers from time to time. In 1385 H/1965 CE heavy rains fell on Ṣan’a’. The Great Mosque was affected and the ceiling in the north west corner was damaged. During the survey, the workers discovered a large vault full of parchment and paper manuscripts of both the Qur'an and non-Qur'anic material.

The UNESCO, an arm of the United Nations, had compiled a CD containing some of the dated Ṣan’a’ manuscripts as a part of "Memory of the World" programme. In this CD there are more than 40 Qur'anic manuscripts which are dated from 1st century of *hijra*, one of them belonging to early 1st century. More than 45 manuscripts have been dated from the period 1st / 2nd century of *hijra*. We will be showing only a few examples below.

A few more examples of the 1st and 1st / 2nd century Qur'anic manuscripts can be found in the book *Masahif Ṣan’a’* (1985, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah). This book is a catalogue of an exhibition at the Kuwait National Museum, with articles by Hussa Sabah Salim al-Sabah, G. R. Puin, M. Jenkins, U. Dreibholz in both Arabic and English. It is expected that the Ṣan’a’ manuscripts will throw a great deal of light on the early Islamic history of calligraphy and illumination and even the various ahruf (they were seven) in which the Qur'an was revealed.

A few words of caution concerning the dating of the Qur'anic manuscripts need to be mentioned. It is to be remembered that assigning a date to an undated early Qur'anic
manuscript is rarely simple especially in the absence of *Wakf* marking. There is a tendency to assume that those in large scripts and without vowels are of the earliest date. This assumption, true to some extent, is nevertheless misleading in two respects. It ignores that fact that small as well as large *masahif* of the Qur'an were among the earliest written and that both types continued to be written thereafter. Though the assumption that manuscripts with the vowels must be considered later than those without is true in some cases, it is not always so, for some very early manuscripts of the Qur'an, originally written without vowels, may well have been voweled later. Furthermore, the first vowel system came into use shortly after the first *masahif* were written. There are also examples of later *masahif* which were unvoweled even after 3 centuries after *hijra*!

1. The Qur'anic Script & Palaeography

On The Origins Of The Kufic Script

1. Introduction

It has been claimed by the Christian missionaries that

… the *Kufic Script* which, according to Qur'an scholars Martin Lings and Yasin Hamid Safadi, did not appear until the late eighth century.

In other words, according to the missionaries, Lings and Safadi say that the Kufic script did not appear until the late eighth century. Therefore, the conclusions drawn by the Christian missionaries suggest that

… both the *Samarkand* and *Topkapi* Codices could not have been written earlier than 150 years after the 'Uthmanic Recension was [supposedly] compiled - at the earliest during the late 700’s or early 800’s since both are written in the *Kufic* script (Gilchrist 1989:144-147).

It appears that the origin of this claim goes back to John Gilchrist, a Christian missionary from South Africa, who claimed about the Qur'anic manuscripts that:

Virtually all the relevant texts surviving were written in a developed form of Kufic script or in one of the other scripts known to have developed some time after the early codification of the Qur’an text. None of them can be reliably dated earlier than the second half of the second century of the Islamic era. We shall proceed to analyse some of these scripts.
This assertion that the Kufic script originated very late, not earlier than 150 years after *hijra*, has been repeated in almost every Christian missionary writing against Islam on the internet. See for example the writings of Joseph Smith and the 'Sermon Series' on *The Fairy Tails of the Qur'an*. That a Christian missionary quotes yet another missionary without proper verification is not too surprising. Bruce McDowell and Anees Zaka quoting Joseph Smith say that the Kufic script:

... did not appear until the 790s of later.[1]

Similarly, using the services of Joseph Smith, N. A. Newman claims that the Kufic script:

... thought to date from about 790 AD.[2]

Similar claims concerning the origins of the Kufic script have been made by Robert Morey[3] and Brett Marlowe Stortroen.[4] In this paper we would examine the claim the origins of the Kufic script in the light of the early Kufic Qur'anic manuscripts as well as Islamic inscriptions.

2. The Origins Of The Kufic Script

We begin with the quote of a Muslim, al-Qalqashandi who maintains that Kufic is said to have been the earliest script from which the others developed, he writes:

قال صاحب”الأحرف الجميلة في شرح العقبة” : والخط العربي هو المعروف الآن بالكُوْفِي وَمِنْهُ أُسْتَنْطِبَتِ الأَفْلَامُ الَّتِي هِيَ الْاَنْ. وَقَدْ ذَكَرَ أَبُنَ الحَسَنِ فِي كِتَابِه

The Arabic script [khatt] is the one which is now known as Kufic. From it evolved all the present pens.[5]

This is a very profound statement as its findings differ greatly from missionaries' assertions! Though Nabia Abbott's conclusions perhaps may not go so far as to agree *ad totum* with this conclusion we find that she does say:

...the Muslim tradition that the original Arabic script was Kufic (that is, *Hiran* or *Anbaran*) is one of those statements which, though known to be half wrong, may yet be half right.[6]

The terms that came to be applied to these scripts by early Arabs themselves could not have the chronological significance that some later Arabs and most Western
writers have put to them. For is it the case that the name of a thing (e.g., Kufic) necessarily indicates its ultimate origin? The fact is that the script which later came to be known as Kufic has its origin far earlier than the founding of the town of Kufah.

Imamuddin writes:

The origin of Kufic or the angular style of Arabic script is traced back to about one hundred years before the foundation of Kufah (17H / 638CE) to which town it owes its name because of its development there.[7]

Similarly Moritz writing in the Encyclopaedia Of Islam says:

Although the script [i.e., Kufic] itself,... was known in Mesopotamia at least 100 years before the foundation of Kufa, we may conjecture that it received its name from the town in which it was first put to official use...[8]

That is to say, the town was founded in AH 17, and the Kufic style originated 100 years before that time! This conclusion is agreed upon by other writers too.[9] Khatibi and Sijelmassi inform us that:

The Arabs usually distinguish four types of pre-Islamic script: al-Ḥirī (from Hira), al-Anbarī (from Anbar), al-Maqqi (from Mecca) and al-Madani (from Medina). The famous author of Fihrist, Ibn Nadim (died c. 390/999) was the first to use the word 'kufic', deriving it from the hiri script. However, Kufic script cannot have originated in Kufa, since that city was founded in 17/638, and the Kufic script is known to have existed before that date, but this great intellectual centre did enable calligraphy to be developed and perfected aesthetically from the pre-Islamic scripts.[10]

What is of note here is that it is the Ḥirān script which later came to be classified as the Kufic. Abbott writes:

... Kufah and Basrah did not start their careers as Muslim cities until the second decade of Islam. But these cities were located closer to Anbar and Ḥirah in Irak, Kufah being but a few miles south of Ḥirah. We have already seen the major role the two earlier cities played in the evolution of Arabic writing, and it is but natural to expect them to have developed a characteristic script to which the newer cities of Kufah and Başra fell heir, so that for Kufic and Başra script one is tempted to substitute Anbaran and Ḥirān ... our study so far shows that the script of Ḥirah must have been the leading script in the 6th century and as such must have influenced all later scripts, including the Makkah - Madinan.[11]
The city of Kufah, therefore, inherited and took on the script which was already prevailing in Hirah. The script, as we have mentioned, became later to be called as Kufic.

3. Martin Lings & Yasin Safadi On The Kufic Script

The missionaries have argued that it is the view of both Martin Lings and Yasin Safadi that the Kufic script
did not appear until the late eighth century.

The claim of Lings and Safadi allegedly saying that the Kufic script did not appear until late eight century has even entered the Christian missionary publications such as the one by Steven Masood. He says concerning the script in the Samaqand codex (note the same argument!):

It is written in a particular type of Kufic script which, according to modern experts in Arabic calligraphy, did not exist until late in the eighth century CE and was not used at all in Makkah and Madinah in the seventh century.[12]

It is difficult to see how this view can be ascribed to Safadi, because he himself, in his work Islamic Calligraphy, details the milestone from the period of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685-705 CE) which he describes as being in the Kufic script![13]

Concerning the the Kufic script, Yasin Safadi says:

The Kufic script, which reached perfection in the second half of the the eighth century, attained a pre-eminence which endured for more than three hundred years ....[14]

In the chapter "Kufic Calligraphy" Martin Lings says:

The first calligraphic perfection of Islam is to be found in the monumental script which may be said to have reached its fullness in the last half of the second century AH which ended in 815 AD.[15]

Can we then assume from this, taking into account the previous evidence, that Safadi held the belief that the script first originated at this time? No, rather he is clearly stating that it is here when it reached its ‘perfection’. Lings and Safadi again arrived at a similar conclusion for their book in honour of the 1976 Qur'an exhibition at the British Museum:
Kufic may be said to have reached its perfection, for Qur'anic manuscripts, in the second half of the second Islamic century which ended in A.D. 814.\textsuperscript{[16]}

One wonders how did the missionaries conclude the appearance of the Kufic script in the late eight century when both Lings and Safadi say that the script reached its perfection in the second half of second Islamic century! Concerning the style of script of the Samarqand codex, there are many examples of it from the first century of \textit{hijra} in the form of dated Kufic inscriptions.

The Christian missionaries are found to be not only incorrect in their dating of the origins of the Kufic script, but also erroneous in their opinion that Kufic is not a script that we would expect to have been employed in the Hijaz during the Caliphate of ‘Uthman. In respect to Lings and Safadi, the missionaries have simply misread their statements.

To conclude, Abbott thinks that the ‘Uthmanic Qur’anic manuscripts were probably written in Makkans-Madinan scripts.\textsuperscript{[17]} The manuscript attributed to ‘Uthman, located at al-Hussein mosque in Cairo, is indeed written in Madinan script.

4. Kufic Qur’anic Manuscripts From First & Second Centuries Of Hijra

The best way to refute the claim of Christian missionaries about the appearance of Kufic script (and hence the Kufic Qur’ans!) around late eighth century CE (or mid-to-late second century of \textit{hijra}) is to show the existence of Kufic Qur’anic manuscripts from first and early second century of \textit{hijra}. The following museums have Kufic Qur’anic manuscripts from 1st and early 2nd century of \textit{hijra}.

\textbf{Austrian National Library}, Vienna, Austria: Kufic manuscripts A. Perg. 203, A Perg. 201 and A Perg. 193 + 196 + 208 are dated from the beginning of second century \textit{hijra}. Manuscripts A. Perg. 186 and A. Perg. 197 are dated to middle second century of \textit{hijra}.\textsuperscript{[18]}

\textbf{Beit al-Qur’an}, Manama, Bahrain: Manuscript 1611-mkh235 is from late 1st century of \textit{hijra}. Manuscript 1620-mkh233 is from 1st / 2nd century of \textit{hijra}.

5. Kufic Inscriptions From 1st Century Of Hijra

The Christian missionaries' arbitrary dating of the origins of Kufic script also contradicts early inscriptions which have been commented upon by both Western and Muslim writers.

1. **The Earliest Dated Kufic Inscription From Qā‘ al-Mu‘tadil, Near Al-Hijr (Saudi Arabia), 24 AH.** This inscription, it appears, is destined to be the most famous of all the Arabic inscriptions as the UNESCO has added it to the Memory of the World Register of Documentary Collections.

2. **Tombstone Of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Khair al-Hajri Dated 31 AH.** This was first published by H. M. El-Hawary who said that it is inscribed in:

   ... carelessly written Cufic script.[19]

   Nabia Abbott reasserts:

   The earliest Muslim inscription, the tombstone of 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khair al-Hajari, dated 31/652... It is certainly not Makkan and can safely be considered as poor Kufic.[20]

3. **An Islamic Inscription On The Darb Zubayda Dated 40 AH.** This Kufic inscription was found on the Darb Zubayda caravan route at Wadi 'l-Shamiya during an archaeological survey in 1970s.

4. **An Islamic Inscription From Wadi Sabil Dated 46 AH.** This inscription was found in Wadi Sabil during the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition.

These Kufic inscriptions date *before* the collection of the Qur'an by ‘Uthman.

6. Dated Manuscripts & Dating Of The Manuscripts: The Difference

A clear distinction needs to be made between dated (or datable) manuscripts and dating of the manuscripts for proper orientation. A steadily increasing number of manuscripts of both the Qur'an and the New Testament with confident allocation of dates by various palaeographers can obscure the fact that we do not have absolute secure dates for majority of the New Testament and Qur'anic manuscripts.

In the case of Greek documentary papyri such as private letters or receipts, the dates are often present. Most of the New Testament manuscripts are written in a literary rather than a documentary hand. Therefore, it always needs a careful investigation of the evidence and involves comparing it with datable parallels to arrive at a reasonable
dating. In the case of Qur'anic manuscripts the dating is carried out by studying the nature of the script, papyrus, ornamentation and illumination. The palaeographers then date the manuscript to a particular century during which such characteristics were seen, a process similar to the one used in the dating of New Testament manuscripts.

The Qur'anic manuscript becomes datable when there is a note on it either from the scribe or the *waqf* showing the date of its accession in a library or the production of the manuscript itself.

Keeping this in mind let us move over to the statement of the Christian missionaries. They say:

Aside from some of the manuscripts discovered in the loft of the Great Mosque in Sanaa in 1972, no manuscript fragment of the Qur'an can be dated earlier than first quarter of the 8th century A.D. - nearly 100 years after Muhammad. (*Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*, Annemarie Schimmel, 1984, p.4)

The statement of the missionaries give an impression that Muslims do not have a datable Qur'anic manuscripts before the first quarter of the eighth century. The quote from Schimmel's book when read in the context says:

The *terminus ante quem* for a fragment or a copy of the Koran can be established only when the piece has a *waqf* note, showing the date of its accession in a certain library. The earliest datable fragments go back to the first quarter of the eighth century...[21]

Schimmel is saying that to firmly date a manuscript, we need something like a *waqf* note. She then mentions about the earliest datable manuscript that goes back to the first quarter of the eighth century. This manuscript is a very famous one and is located at the Egyptian National Library (was formerly at ‘Amr Mosque), dated 107 AH / 725 CE. Moritz has reproduced a large number of pages from this codex.[22] Arnold and Grohmann assigns this specific date.[23] The dating of this manuscript has been recently corroborated by Marilyn Jenkins of Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) by studying the ornamentation.[24] A folio of the manuscript is reproduced below.
Folios contains Surahs Ya-Sin, 72-83 and Al-Ṣaffat, 1-14. It is written in mashq script, on vellum. No aya markers and no surah headings.

It is not true that the earliest datable manuscript goes back to the first quarter of the eighth century. The famous palaeographer Adolf Grohmann informs us that

one dated copy exists from the first century of Hijra and two exists from the second, seven only from the third century of Hijra.\[25\]

The first century manuscript is dated 94 AH / 712-13 CE and is from Iran. The two second century hijra copies, dating 102 AH / 720 CE and 107 AH / 725 CE are in Egyptian National Library, Cairo; the latter we have already discussed above.\[26\]

A word of caution needs to be added. Whenever there is a waqf marking on the manuscripts, it is the burden of the paleographer to estimate the time between the writing of a manuscript and its being deposited in a mosque or any other religious institution. In other words, the wakf marking is not the true representative of the exact age of the manuscript. It only overestimates the date of writing of the manuscript.

No discussion about the dated manuscripts is finished without the mention of the status of New Testament manuscripts. We have no dated manuscripts of the New Testament until the Uspenski gospels of 835 CE.\[27\] This is not very unusual, as
literary documents were not generally dated in antiquity. The first literary manuscript (Vindob. Med. Gr. 1) dated by the scribe is a text of Dioscorides from 512 CE now in Vienna.[28]

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, we have seen that the script which came to know as Kufic existed before the founding of city of Kufah. It was this script which reached its fullness or perfection in the second half of the eighth century CE. This is a clear refutation of the claims of John Gilchrist and other missionaries who have asserted that the Kufic script originated very late; not earlier than 150 years after hijra.

And Allah knows best!

References & Notes


[14] ibid., p. 10. See also a similar assertion on p. 42.


The Dotting Of A Script And The Dating Of An Era: The Strange Neglect Of PERF 558

It is now over forty years since I first came across information about the papyrus known as PERF 558, a bilingual Greek and Arabic document from Ihnas (known in Greek as Herakleopolis) in Upper Egypt. I wondered then at the general failure to recognise the central importance of the document, and over the years my wonder has grown.

PERF 558 is just one of a crucial group of twenty-two papyri from Egypt, written mainly in Greek but with the odd one in Greek and Arabic, and dating from the period A.H. 22-57, that found their way in the nineteenth century into the Erzherzog Rainer
Papyrus Collection in Vienna. Their authenticity has never been challenged, nor can I see any valid basis for such a challenge. The wealth of circumstantial detail that they contain is such that they can only come from the period indicated. The minutiae that we find in them would simply have not been available to anyone writing at any later stage of history.

The whole group has had the attention of some papyrologists, notably Adolf Grohmann, and of some of those interested in the early Muslim administration of Egypt,[1] but real attention seems to have stopped there. I suspect that some of the problem lies with the fact that Caetani does not appear to have been aware of PERF 558 when he compiled volume 4 of the *Annali*, though he did know of others in the group.[2] It is probably as a result of this that PERF 558 is only occasionally mentioned in more general historical writings by Western scholars, and then only in passing, for example in footnotes by Crone and Cook in *Hagarism*[3] and by Hoyland in *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*.[4] References in Muslim sources are even rarer.[5] Yet, as I hope this brief paper will show, it should be well known to all those interested in early Islam.

The first serious examination of PERF 558 is to be found in the *Corpus Papyrorum Archiducis Rainer*, III I, pt. 2,[6] published in Vienna in 1923-24, edited by Adolf Grohmann. However, it was another work by Grohmann published in 1932 that made the document more accessible. This was his *Aperçu de papyrologie arabe*, published in Cairo.[7] It was through the *Aperçu* that I first made my acquaintance with PERF 558. Grohmann's transcriptions and translations of both the Greek and the Arabic versions are a model of their kind, though one might question a couple of his readings. The facsimile plate, however, is hardly legible. Later plates were better,[8] but the most legible depiction of the original Arabic text is a tracing by Beatrice Gruendler in *The Development of the Arabic Scripts*,[9] to which I would refer those who wish to get an idea of how the original looks. The subject of the texts of the papyrus is mundane. It is simply the acknowledgement of the requisition of sixty-five sheep from Herakleopolis by the forces led by `Abd-Allah b. Jabir, to be set off against the year's taxes. It has been suggested that the Greek version was written first, but this is by no means certain. The Greek occupies lines 1-3 and half of line 5 (5a) on the *recto*, and there is also a line on the *verso*. The Arabic occupies line 4, half of line 5 (5b) and lines 6-8 on the *recto*. The Arabic is not a direct translation of the Greek, but the core of the contents is the same in both versions. The Greek version refers to the Arab invaders as *magaritai* (i.e., *muhajirun*).[10] Despite its age PERF 558 is relatively easy to read. There are two reasons for this: it is written in a clear cursive hand; and it contains a fair sprinkling of dots. As will be seen, there are dotted forms of six letters [*jim, kha', dhal, za', shin and nun*], all of which are also to be found
without dots]; there are some long vowels \([a, i, \text{ and } u]\) are all to be found, though \(a\) is more frequently omitted]; and there are some examples of \(alif\) maqsurah.

In the following transliteration a line underneath a letter has been used to indicate that the letter has no dot in the original. The transliteration also uses the following non-standard signs, to allow all letters to be represented by a single character and to avoid using diacritics that might fuse with the underlining:

\[
\begin{align*}
\Theta &= \text{tha}' & S &= \text{shin} & G &= \text{ghayn} \\
H &= \text{ha}' & S &= \text{sad} & h &= \text{ha}' \\
X &= \text{kha}' & \tau &= \text{ta}' & O &= \text{ta}' \text{ marbuṭah}. \; ^{1} \\
\delta &= \text{dhal} & E &= \text{‘ayn} & A &= \text{used to transliterate alif.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

[ ] surround an addition.

[4] \(\text{BSMALLh ALRHMN ALRHYM hδA MA AXδEBD ALh}\)


[6] \(\text{MN XLYFO TDRQ ABN ABW QYR ALASGR W-MN} \\
\text{ELYFO ASrFR ABN ABW QYR ALAKBR XMSYN SAO}\)

[7] \(\text{MN ALJZR W-XMS E$RO$ $SAO$ AXRY AJZRhA ASH[A]B} \\
\text{SFNH WKT[A]'Bh WΘQLa[\text{']}h FY}\)

[8] \(\text{$hR JM[A]DY AL-AWLY MN SNO AΘNTYN W-E$RYN W-KTB} \\
\text{ABN HDYD W}\)

In the name of the Merciful, Compassionate God. These are the animals for slaughtering that `Abd-Allah ibn Jabir and his companions took from Ihnas: we took from the representatives of Theodor[akios], the elder son of Abu Qir, and from the representative of [Chr]istofor[os], the younger son of Abu Qir, fifty sheep from the animals for slaughter and fifteen other sheep, which were butchered for the men on his ships, his cavalry and his infantry in the month Jumada I of the year Twenty-Two. The scribe was Ibn Hadid.
Though the main contents of the document cannot be described as vital, except to the sheep and the expeditionary force, the Arabic version contains two features that are of outstanding significance. The first is the script that is used; the second is that the date is given as the year A.H. 22.

The year 22 is the first Islamic year for which any dated documents written in Arabic survive, and there are only two of those: P Berol 15002,[11] which is unfortunately fragmentary, and PERF 558, the first complete Arabic document of the Muslim era.

The orthographic features† of PERF 558 set out above would be of great interest at any time during the first century, but the earlier the date the more important they become. Further, the way that they are used in PERF 558 indicates that they are hardly likely to be a new development. Gruendler sums up the position succinctly: "the first cursive influence must therefore be expected several decades earlier."[12] The fact that they can be traced back to A.H. 22 and earlier means that the traditional view that these orthographic features date from the period when al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf was governor of Iraq (694-714) cannot be correct. This traditional view is neatly set out for us in Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p. 219:

He [al-Hajjaj] contributed to the development of diacritical marks in Arabic orthography to distinguish such similarly written letters as *ba*, *ta*, and *tha*, *dal* and *dhal*, and to the adaptation from Syriac of vowel signs, *damma* (u), *fatha* (a) and *kasra* (i), inserted above and below the consonants. In this orthographic reform he was prompted by the desire to prevent errors in the recitation of the sacred text, of which he evidently prepared a critical revision.

On the evidence of PERF 558 and other papyri, much of the above paragraph is misleading and must be discarded. The use of signs for short vowels appears to have been new, but this cannot have been the case with the other features, which must have been available to the earliest scribes of the Qur'an (whether they were used or not).

A possible explanation may be that less cursive styles than that exhibited in PERF 558 were used for the writing of the Qur'an, and that dotting did not feature in these; but the most that al-Hajjaj could have insisted on was the revival and regular use of earlier features.

This combination of date and script would be remarkable enough in itself, but the papyrus has yet another nugget of priceless information. The Greek version has its own Byzantine date[13] in line 5a of the recto of the papyrus. This has the form: "30 Pharmouthi of the indiction year 1". Such dates are commonly found in Greek papyri, and indeed there are half a dozen other documents in the Erzherzog Rainer Papyrus
group that have indication dates for the period A.D. 642-43. The only problem is that the indication cycle is a relatively short one of fifteen years, and thus great care is needed in working out the appropriate date in the Christian era. Grohmann worked out "30 Pharmouthi of the indication year 1" to be 25th April, 643 A.D.

The date fits with two of the most commonly available conversion tables: those of Caetani and of Freeman-Grenville. They make the last day of Jumada I equate with 26th April, 643 A.D. Given the virtual inevitability of imprecisions of dating at the period, the fit is remarkably good.

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† The reference codes for these papyri come from the Catalogue of the Erzherzog Rainer Papyrus Collection put together by J. von Karabacek and others in Vienna in 1894. The papyri, numbered 552-573 in the catalogue, now form part of the collections of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

†† I know of no one who has suggested that the papyri might have some later origin or suggested that carbon dating or other scientific tests be applied. For my part I am confident that scientific tests would confirm the age of the papyri.

††† Abd-Allah ibn Jabir is known only from the papyri. He is referred to in PERF 555, 556, 558, 559 and 561. See Caetani, Annali, 4, A.H. 21, para. 99; Caetani and Gabrieli, Onomasticon Arabicum, 2, entry 11436.

*** There are sixteen ordinary dotted letters. In addition, in line 7 the alif of ASH[A]B is preceded by a dot. There is a similar instance in an inscription dated A.H. 80. (See Gruendler, op. cit., pp. 32 and 18.) Both examples may indicate hamzah. Hamzah may also lurk in the cluster WKT[A]h in line 7, which has a spike that might be considered to be either a ya' or the bearer of a hamzah. The odds are slightly in favour of a bearer, as one might expect a similar spike in the next cluster WQQLA' [ ]h if a ya' were intended. This possible indication of hamzah must remain uncertain.

‡ Of the ta' marbutah of later times there is of course no sign; final ha' is employed where necessary.

§ Literally "This is what 'Abd-Allah ibn Jabir and his companions took from Ilnas from the animals for slaughtering."

The translation gives the name forms recoverable from the Greek version, which may be translated as:
Recto

1. In the name of God. [From the] Amir `Abd-Allah to you Christophor[os and] Theodor[akios], pagarchs of Herakle[opolis],

2. I have taken from you for the purpose of feeding the Saracens who are with me in Herakle[opolis] 65 sheep (sixty-

3. five and no more); and I have had the present document written to make this clear.

5a Written by me, Ionnes, no[tary] and off[icial], 30th day of the month of Pharmouthi of the ind[iction year] 1.

Verso

1. Document about sheep given to the muhajirun (Greek magaritai) and other [new] arrivals, towards the payment of the taxes of the Ind[iction year] 1.

* Literally "which the men on his ships. . . had butchered."

** The name Ibn Hadid is followed by a further waw, the import of which is not clear, though there are parallels in the Safaitic inscriptions.

† The orthographic features can be seen in other early papyri, including P Berol 15002, but they are at their clearest in P558.

○ Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (c. A.D. 661-714) is usually credited with the improvement of the script used for writing the Qur'an (See, for example, Nöldeke, Geschichte des Qorans, 3, pp. 260 ff). It may be that the basis of this was just one facet of his general quest for stability in all areas of life, but he seems to have pursued the matter with his usual vigour. He wanted the new text to supersede any other, and he seems to have succeeded. In a handful of readings it appears to be his preference rather than that of the `Uthmanic recension that has prevailed (see Ibn Abi Da'ud, Kitab al-Masahif, ed. A.Jeffery, pp. 117-118)).

*** Freeman-Grenville, Tables, leaves it to the reader to work this out, and so I may be wrong.

+++ Whilst such tables as those produced by Caetani and Freeman-Grenville and others may have a spurious certainty (and this is perhaps even more so with recent versions on CD-ROM), it would appear that they are not likely to be far out.
Endnotes

[1] See, for example, Kosei Morimoto, "Taxation in Egypt under the Arab Conquest," Orient (Tokyo) 15 (1979), pp. 71-99, and The Fiscal Administration of Egypt in the Early Islamic Period (Kyoto, 1981), though the emphasis is on other documents. One might have expected something useful in Frazer's revision of Butler's Arab Conquest of Egypt (A.J. Butler, The Arab Conquest of Egypt, 2nd edition revised by P.M. Frazer, Oxford, 1978); but though Frazer's introductory notes have a reasonably good section on the papyrological evidence (pp. lxxvi-lxxxi), PERF 558 is not dealt with.

[2] Published in 1911. Caetani was aware of PERF 555, 556, 559 and 561.


[5] The two that I have seen are in works still under consideration for publication.


[10] The fullest discussions of the Greek term, of which there are variant spellings, are to be found in P. Crone and M. Cook, Hagarism, passim.


Radiocarbon (Carbon-14) Dating And The Qur'anic Manuscripts

1. Introduction

Radiocarbon, or Carbon-14 dating was developed by W. F. Libby, E. C. Anderson and J. R. Arnold in 1949. This radiometric dating technique is a way of determining the age of certain archaeological artefacts of a biological origin up to about 50,000 years old. It is perhaps one of the most widely used and best known absolute dating methods and has become an indispensable part of an archaeologist's tool-kit. In 1960, Libby was awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry for radiocarbon dating.

In this paper we would briefly discuss the principles and practice of radiocarbon dating. This will enable the reader to gain an appreciation of the advantages and disadvantages of this process. Is carbon dating applied to the Qur'anic manuscripts? Can radiocarbon dating provide more accurate results than traditional palaeographic techniques and associated methods? We will also focus on these questions in the final section of our discussion.

2. Principles And Practice
Carbon has two stable, nonradioactive isotopes: carbon-12 (\(^{12}\text{C}\)), and carbon-13 (\(^{13}\text{C}\)). In addition, there are tiny amounts of the unstable radioactive isotope carbon-14 (\(^{14}\text{C}\)) on Earth. These isotopes are present in the following amounts: \(^{12}\text{C} - 98.89\%\), \(^{13}\text{C} - 1.11\%\) and \(^{14}\text{C} - 0.00000000010\%\). In other words, one carbon 14 atom exists in nature for every 1,000,000,000,000 \(^{12}\text{C}\) atoms in a living being.

**ORIGIN OF CARBON-14**

When cosmic rays enter the earth's atmosphere, they undergo various interactions with gas molecules which results in the production of fast moving neutrons. These energetic neutrons dissociate a nitrogen molecule into atoms and then reacts with these atoms to form \(^{14}\text{C}\). The reaction can be written as:

\[ n + ^{14}\text{N} \rightarrow ^{14}\text{C} + p \]

where \(n\) is a neutron and \(p\) is a proton.

The highest rate of \(^{14}\text{C}\) production takes place at stratospheric altitudes of 9 to 15 km. Unlike the commonly available carbon, \(^{12}\text{C}\), \(^{14}\text{C}\) is unstable and slowly decays, changing it back to nitrogen and releasing energy. This instability makes it radioactive.

**ASSIMILATION OF CARBON-14 IN THE EARTH'S BIOSPHERE**

The \(^{14}\text{C}\) isotope is brought to the earth by atmospheric activities (such as storms) and becomes fixed in the biosphere. Since \(^{14}\text{C}\) reacts just like \(^{12}\text{C}\) and \(^{13}\text{C}\) isotopes of carbon, it becomes part of a plant through photosynthesis reactions. Animals eating these plants in turn absorb \(^{14}\text{C}\) as well as the stable isotopes (i.e., \(^{12}\text{C}\) and \(^{13}\text{C}\)). This process of ingesting \(^{14}\text{C}\) continues as long as the plant or animal remains alive. Because \(^{14}\text{C}\) is so well mixed up with \(^{12}\text{C}\), the ratio between \(^{14}\text{C}\) and \(^{12}\text{C}\) is the same in a leaf from a tree, or a part of an animal body. \(^{14}\text{C}\) also enters the Earth's oceans in an atmospheric exchange and as dissolved carbonate. The entire \(^{14}\text{C}\) inventory is termed the *carbon exchange reservoir*.

**DEATH, DECAY & DATING**

As soon as a plant or animal dies, the metabolic function of carbon uptake is ceased. There is no replenishment of radioactive \(^{14}\text{C}\) and the amount of \(^{14}\text{C}\) gradually decreases through radioactive decay as given by the following equation.

\[ ^{14}\text{C} \rightarrow ^{14}\text{N} + \beta \]
After the emission of a $\beta$ particle, $^{14}$C is changed into stable and non-radioactive nitrogen, $^{14}$N. In other words, the $^{14}$C/$^{12}$C ratio gets smaller and smaller over time. So, we have something like a "clock" which starts ticking the moment a living being dies. Thus the radiocarbon dating method can, in principle, be uniformly applied throughout the world.

Libby, Anderson and Arnold were the first to measure the rate of this decay and found that the half life of $^{14}$C was 5568 years, i.e., in 5568 years half the $^{14}$C in the original sample will have decayed. After another 5568 years, half of that remaining material will have decayed, and so on. A $^{14}$C half-life of $5568 \pm 30$ years is known as the Libby half-life.[5] Later measurements of the Libby half-life indicated the figure was approximately 3% lower; a more accurate half-life was $5730 \pm 40$ years. This value is known as the Cambridge half-life.[6]

After 10 half-lives, there is a small amount of radioactive carbon left in a sample. In about 50,000-60,000 years, therefore, the limit of this technique is reached. It must be emphasized that the $^{14}$C decay is constant and spontaneous. In other words, the probability of decay for an atom of $^{14}$C in a sample is constant, thus making it amenable to the application of statistical methods for the analysis of counting data.

**LIMITATIONS OF RADIOCARBON DATING**

No technique is perfect and radiocarbon dating is no exception. Although with this technique almost any sample of organic material can be directly dated, there are a number of limitations which makes the technique imperfect.

1. **Size of the sample:** The size of the archaeological sample is important, the larger the better, as purification of the sample removes some matter.

2. **Sample handling:** The handling of samples must be done with care in order to avoid contamination by more recent carbon. The samples should be packed in air-tight and chemically neutral materials to avoid picking up new $^{14}$C from the atmosphere or packaging.

3. **$^{14}$C to $^{12}$C ratio:** It is assumed that the ratio of $^{14}$C to $^{12}$C was constant in the earlier periods. This, however, is not true.[7] Radiocarbon samples taken and cross dated using other techniques like dendrochronology have shown that the ratio of $^{14}$C to $^{12}$C has varied significantly during the history of the Earth. Such a variation can be due to changes in the intensity of the cosmic radiation bombardment of the Earth. The $^{14}$C level is affected by variations in the cosmic ray intensity which is affected by variations caused by solar storms. A good...
example is the increased level of $^{14}$C in the atmosphere today as compared to about 20 years ago – a result of the recent depletion of the ozone layer. Also after the advent of the industrial era, the massive burning of fossil fuels released a lot of carbon dioxide that was depleted in $^{14}$C (Suess Effect). This would make things which died at that time appear older in terms of radiocarbon dating. These variations are compensated by using standard calibration tables developed in the past 15-20 years in various radiocarbon laboratories.

4. **Limits due to exponential decay**: As mentioned earlier, the decay of $^{14}$C is exponential in nature. This results in significant upper and lower limits. Radiocarbon dating is not very accurate for fairly recent deposits as very little decay has occurred. This gives rise to large standard deviations or errors in the date obtained. As for the practical upper limit, it is about 50,000 years. This is because so little $^{14}$C remains after almost 10 half-lives that it may be hard to detect and obtain an accurate reading, irrespective of the size of the sample.

**MATHEMATICS, MEASUREMENT AND CALIBRATION**

The radioactive decay of $^{14}$C follows what is called an exponential decay. Here the amount of $^{14}$C decreases at a rate proportional to its value. Mathematically, it can be expressed in the form of a differential equation, where $N$ is the quantity of $^{14}$C and $\lambda$ is called the decay constant. \[ dN = -\lambda N \, dt \quad \text{or} \quad \frac{dN}{N} = -\lambda \, dt \]

Solving this differential equation gives the standard form of the decay equation:

$$ N = N_0 e^{-\lambda t} $$

$N_0$ = number of radiocarbon atoms at time $t = 0$, i.e., the origin of the disintegration time right after the death of plant or animal,
$N$ = number of radiocarbon atoms remaining after radioactive decay during the time $t$,
$\lambda$ = radiocarbon decay constant.

Perhaps the most famous of all the radiocarbon measurement techniques is the *Accelerator Mass Spectrometry* (AMS). Just like other mass spectrometry studies, AMS is performed by converting the atoms in the sample into a beam of fast moving ions. The sample is first ionized by bombarding it with caesium ions and then focused
into a fast-moving beam. The ions then enter the accelerator. The accelerator is used to help remove ions that might be confused with $^{14}$C ions before the final detection. The ions are filtered and finally the $^{14}$C ions enter the detector where they can be counted. In AMS, the radiocarbon atoms are directly detected instead of waiting for them to decay as in Gas Proportional Counting (GPC) or Liquid Scintillation Spectrometry (LSS). Therefore, the sample sizes are typically very small, generally in the order of a few milligrams.

Raw radiocarbon measurements are usually reported in years Before Present or BP. Before Present (BP) years are the units of time, counted backwards to the past, used to report raw radiocarbon ages and dates referenced to the BP scale origin in the year 1950 CE. There are two reasons as to why 1950 CE was established as the origin year for the BP scale. Firstly, in this year the calibration curves for carbon-14 dating were established and secondly, the year 1950 predates atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons, which altered the global balance of $^{14}$C to $^{12}$C (Atom Bomb Effect).

The radiocarbon measurements reported in terms of BP years is directly based on the proportion of radiocarbon found in the sample. Its calculation is based on the assumption that the atmospheric radiocarbon concentration has always been the same as it was in 1950. As we have noted earlier, this is not true. The $^{14}$C to $^{12}$C ratio varied by a few percent over time. Hence this requires a need of calibration. Calibration of radiocarbon determinations is, in principle, very simple. The radiocarbon measurement of a sample is compared with a tree ring with the same proportion of radiocarbon. Since the calendar age of the tree rings is known, this gives the age of the sample. In practice, there are limitations. The measurements on both the sample and the tree rings have a limited precision. This will give rise to a range of possible calendar years. Furthermore, since the atmospheric radiocarbon concentration has varied in the past, there might be several possible ranges. In order to understanding how radiocarbon dating works in practice, let us study a few examples from the Qur'anic manuscripts.

3. Carbon-14 Dating Of Qur'anic Manuscripts

The mention of radiocarbon dating of Qur'anic manuscripts in the literature is very rare. Apart from perhaps the biggest drawback of this technique being very expensive, there are issues such as a wide range of calendar years in which a manuscript could have been written. This resulted in a faster development of the "traditional" methods of Qur'anic palaeography that utilized script, ornamentation and illumination which were then compared with their dated counterparts in architecture. The radiocarbon dating, on the other hand, even if it is carried out, is rarely mentioned. This will
become clear when we discuss the Qur'anic manuscripts which were radiocarbon dated.

E 20 - A QUR'ANIC MANUSCRIPT FROM ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

Figure 1: The Qur'an Fragment, Cat. No. 1, Acc. No. E 20. The fragment marks the end of Surah al-Hujurat and the beginning of Surah Qaf.

The E 20 manuscript (Figure 1), housed in the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, comes from Uzbekistan. A detailed history of this manuscript was published by Efim Rezvan in 2000. In the same year, he also published a radiocarbon dating of this manuscript. A radiocarbon analysis was conducted on parchment fragments, the results of which are depicted in Figure 2.
Figure 2: (a) The radiocarbon concentration in the sample, calibration using the tree rings and depiction of possible ages of the sample in the form of a history (see text below). (b) A histogram showing the possible ages of the E 20 manuscript.\(^{16}\)

The main elements of Figure 2(a) are as follows:

- The left-hand axis shows radiocarbon concentration expressed in years Before Present or BP and the bottom axis shows calendar years derived from the tree ring data.

- The dotted curve on the left, marked with a blue arrow, indicates the radiocarbon concentration in the sample.

- The continuous curve, marked with a green arrow, shows the radiocarbon measurements on the tree rings.
• The dotted histogram, marked with a red arrow, shows possible ages for the sample; the higher the histogram the more likely that age is. This histogram is enlarged in Figure 2(b).

In the case of this manuscript the radiocarbon result is 1150 ± 50 BP. This indicates that the age is 1150 BP with a standard uncertainty of ±50 years. The age of 1150 BP is calculated on the simplistic assumption that the amount of radiocarbon in the atmosphere has always been the same. This is not quite the case except that it is a rough indication of the age. Hence the measurement must be calibrated against samples of known ages, for example, the tree rings. The radiocarbon data and the calibration curve are used to plot the probability distribution of the age of the manuscript.

In the case of the E 20 manuscript from St. Petersburg, the 68.3% confidence level (1σ) yields the ranges, 781 CE - 791 CE, 825 CE - 843 CE, 859 CE - 903 CE and 915 CE - 977 CE. The 95.4% confidence level (2σ) yields 775 CE - 995 CE. A palaeographic analysis of this manuscript proposed a date around the final quarter of the 8th century CE.[17] This dating was also agreed by François Déroche.[18]

It should be highlighted that when conducting radiocarbon analysis, almost any date within the specified range generated by the confidence level is equally possible scientifically. It is not the case that the range can be averaged to find the most probable date. Thus, given the wide range of calendar years, radiocarbon dating rarely provides unexpected information to an experienced palaeographer; however this is not always the case as we will see next.

THE AL-WALID MANUSCRIPT FROM SAN‘A’, YEMEN (INV. NO. 20-33.1)

This is perhaps one of the most well-studied Qur'anic manuscripts and comes from Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir in San‘a' (Yemen). Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer from the University of Saarland, Germany, studied this manuscript in great detail from the point of view of script, ornamentation and illumination.[19] It is the earliest known and firmly dated manuscript from the late 1st century of hijra written in the Kufic script. This monumental Qur'anic manuscript has the dimensions of 51 cm in length by 47 cm in width (Figure 3). Its origin appears to be from Syria.

*Figure 3: A folio of the "Great Umayyad Qur'an" from San'a' (Yemen).*[20]
Using palaeography, ornamentation and illumination of this manuscript, von Bothmer dated it to the last decade of the 1st century of hijra, around 710 - 715 CE, in the reign of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid. However, the radiocarbon dating of this manuscript suggests a date between 657 and 690 CE.\cite{21} Again he confirms the dating of this manuscript elsewhere by pointing out that:

Certain features of the manuscript and the iconography intimate that this work was made for a member of the Umayyad family; historical circumstances suggest that caliph al-Walid himself may have commissioned it. However, the carbon dating points to a slightly earlier date.\cite{22}

Here it is interesting to note that both the palaeographic considerations and radiocarbon dating have arrived at nearly the same conclusion, i.e., this manuscript dates to the last part of the 1st century of hijra. However, as von Bothmer has noted, the radiocarbon dating gives a slightly earlier date. This could be due to the fact that the radiocarbon dating gives the death of an animal and not when the manuscript was actually written.

The interesting thing to note about this Qur'an from al-Walid's time is its uncanny resemblance to a number of large Qur'anic manuscripts typified as "Group 2" by Estelle Whelan. The most famous of them is the Chester Beatty 1404.\cite{21} The Chester Beatty 1404 manuscript has very similar features that are reminiscent of the Umayyad period. Moritz published details of the twenty ornamented pages.\cite{24} This manuscript was dated to 1st century of hijra by A. S. Yahuda.\cite{25} Moritz, in the legends to his photographs, dated it to the 2nd / 3rd century hijra.\cite{26} On the other hand, Josef von Karabacek dated it to the 3rd century.\cite{27} However, now a firm dating of a Qur'an belonging to "Group 2" from al-Walid's time suggests that the Chester Beatty 1404 manuscript also dates from similar period, i.e., either late 1st century or early second century of hijra. Furthermore, this also lends support to the early dating of the numerous primitive hijazi manuscripts.

**A MONUMENTAL QUR'ANIC MANUSCRIPT IN TASHKENT ATTRIBUTED TO CALIPH ‘UTHMAN**

Approximately one third of the Qur'an from which this massive folio originates - the ‘Uthman Qur'an (as shown below), is housed in Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Late in the 19th century the manuscript was in St. Petersberg, Russia, where it was studied by the Russian orientalist A. F. Shebunin and in 1905 a facsimile of it was published. It would appear that during this period in St. Petersberg, a number of folios were separated from this manuscript and subsequently ended up under the hammer at Christie's\cite{28} with some folios appearing in Sam Fogg's collection of Islamic art.\cite{29}
This is a massive Qur'anic manuscript on vellum with a size of approximately 55 cm x 70 cm, showing a well-formed Kufic script without pointing or diacritics (Figure 4). The verse endings are marked by small panels of diagonals lines; the tenth verse is marked with a square medallion illuminated in blue, green, red and manganese with a stellar design. Shebunin dated this manuscript to the late first / early second century hijra.[30] On the basis of the orthography as observed in the 1905 facsimile, Jeffrey dated it to the early ninth century.[31] More recently, Déroche had assigned a date to the second half of the eight century.[32] The carbon-dating of a folio from this manuscript was carried out at Oxford. The result showed a 68% probability of a date between 640 CE and 765 CE, and a 95% probability of a date between 595 CE and 855 CE.[33] Commenting on this result, Rezvan noted that the paleographic dating of this manuscript also indicated a date at the turn of the eight/ninth century CE.[34]

Figure 4: A folio from a massive Qur'an attributed to Caliph 'Uthman. It was found in North Africa.[35]

The extra-ordinary size of the folios from this Qur'an is unparalleled in publications in the Western world. Folios from the Tashkent manuscript were sold at Christie's (London) as lot nos. 225, 225a on 22nd October 1992;[36] and lot nos. 29, 30 on 21st October 1993.[37] In the years 2000 and 2003, a couple more folios appeared in Sam Fogg's Islamic Manuscripts / Islamic Calligraphy catalogues.[38]

Our discussion points to the fact that the palaeographic and the radiocarbon datings sometimes nearly match each other. In fact, similar conclusions have been reached for the Dead Sea Scrolls using radiocarbon and palaeographic datings. Various fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls were radiocarbon dated in 1991[39] and more recently in 1995.[40] Comparing the palaeographic and radiocarbon dating of the scrolls, the study published in 1991 concluded that:

Our research put to test both the radiocarbon method and palaeography; seemingly, both disciplines have fared well.[41]

Similar conclusions were also reached by the 1995 study. It says:

Ages determined from $^{14}$C measurements on the remainder of the Dead Sea Scroll samples are in reasonable agreement with palaeographic estimates of such ages, in the cases where those estimates are available.[42]

It must be borne in mind that the conclusions of these two studies are based on the confidence level of $1\sigma$ (or 68%).[40] In other words, in 68% of the cases the date will be within a particular range. If the range is increased from $1\sigma$ to $2\sigma$, the percentage can be increased from 68% to 95%. Consequently, it will also effect the overall agreement between radiocarbon and palaeographic datings.[44]
4. Conclusions

The radiocarbon dating of Qur'anic manuscripts in the literature is very rare as this technique is not only very expensive but also provides a wide range of calendar years in which a particular manuscript could have been written. Just as no technique is perfect radiocarbon dating is no exception. There are a number of factors that can affect the accuracy of the result, including sample type, sample size, sample handling and the $^{14}$C to $^{12}$C ratio (calibration data).

As for the examples of carbon-dated manuscripts, the E 20 manuscript housed in the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies was discussed in detail. This manuscript is palaeographically dated to around the final quarter of the 8th century CE. The carbon dating, depending upon the confidence levels, yields a variety of time periods. A 95.4 % confidence level ($2\sigma$) yields 775 CE - 995 CE. The "Great Umayyad Qur'an" or the al-Walid Manuscript from Maktabat al-Jami' al-Kabir in San’a' (Yemen), is carbon-dated to between 657 and 690 CE. Using palaeography, ornamentation and illumination, H-C. Graf von Bothmer dated it to the last decade of the 1st century of hijra, around 710 - 715 CE, in the reign of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid. Folios from a monumental Qur'anic manuscript in Kufic script on vellum attributed to Caliph ‘Uthman with a size of approximately 55 cm x 70 cm were auctioned by Christie's (London) in 1992 and 1993. The carbon-dating of this manuscript was carried out at Oxford, the results of which show a 68% probability of a date between 640 CE and 765 CE, and a 95% probability of a date between 595 CE and 855 CE. Although the dates generated by the radiocarbon dating at either confidence level do not rule out the possibility that this manuscript was produced in ‘Uthman's time, palaeographic studies suggest an 8th century (2nd century hijra) date.

It is interesting to note that the palaeographic and the radiocarbon datings sometimes nearly match each other. Radiocarbon dating can't replace the traditional time-tested method of palaeography. Radiocarbon dating can only supplement the "traditional" palaeography and is rarely used in dating. In fact, von Bothmer points out that the radiocarbon dating is not only expensive but also has the results scattered over a long time period, sometimes spanning a few hundred years. He suggests that the "traditional" methods of Arabic palaeography are more precise and offer a smaller range for dating the Qur'anic manuscripts. Whilst proposing a new data-base method for collating, schematising and dating early Qur'anic manuscripts, Efim Rezvan laments at the methodological stagnation in accurately dating early Qur'anic manuscripts. With regard to modern-physical methods such as radiocarbon dating, he states:
Modern physical methods make it possible to date various kinds of written materials with an margin of error of 100-200 years either way. Hence, we cannot rely on these methods. It is our hope that the analysis of a great number of manuscripts using the data-base will enable us to find some new grounds for dating.\[67\]

Similar conclusions have also been reached by Gerd-R. Puin who states:

Because determining the age of the parchment itself by scientific methods is still very inaccurate - the margin of error being ± 100 - 200 years! - an art historical approach, in this case, seems to be more suitable.\[44\]

And Allah knows best!

References & Notes


Also published in Masahif San'a', 1985, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah: Kuwait, p. 45.

Hans-Casper Graf von Bothmer says:


Noting that the E20 Manuscript and the Samargand Manuscript produce a range of 220 years and 260 years respectively at the 95% confidence level, Sheila Blair is suspicious of the low range reported by von Bothmer, noting it is only 33 years in length. Furthermore, she complains that the testing facility and standard deviations (confidence levels) are absent. See S. S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 2006, Edinburgh University Press Ltd: Edinburgh (Scotland), p. 125 and p. 139, footnote 95. Hans-Casper von Bothmer is currently preparing a voluminous tome on the San‘a’ manuscripts. Any judgements as to the soundness and completeness of the results reported above will be resolved by the publication of this volume.


E. Whelan, "Writing the Word of God: Some Early Qur'an Manuscripts And Their Milieux, Part I", *Ars Orientalis*, 1990, op. cit., p. 120.


[28] Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London, Tuesday, 20 October 1992 at 10 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 22 October 1992 at 2.30 p.m., 1992, Christie's: London, p. 88 (Lot 225); Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London, Tuesday, 20 October 1992 at 10 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 22 October 1992 at 2.30 p.m., 1992, Christie's: London, p. 89 (Lot 225A); Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London, Tuesday, 19 October 1993 at 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 21 October 1993 at 2.30 p.m., 1993, Christie's: London, p. 20 (Lot 29); Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London, Tuesday, 19 October 1993 at 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 21 October 1993 at 2.30 p.m., 1993, Christie's: London, p. 21 (Lot 30).


[31] op. cit.


[36] Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London, Tuesday, 20 October 1992 at 10 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 22 October 1992 at 2.30 p.m., 1992, op. cit.,
p. 88 (Lot 225); *Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London*, Tuesday, 20 October 1992 at 10 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 22 October 1992 at 2.30 p.m., 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 89 (Lot 225A).

[37] *Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London*, Tuesday, 19 October 1993 at 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 21 October 1993 at 2.30 p.m., 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 20 (Lot 29); *Islamic Art, Indian Miniatures, Rugs And Carpets: London*, Tuesday, 19 October 1993 at 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m., Thursday, 21 October 1993 at 2.30 p.m., 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 21 (Lot 30).


Perhaps the earliest 14C dating on the Dead Sea Scroll material was done by Libby. He dated the linen wrapping the scroll and determined the value to be 1917 ± 200 BP. See W. F. Libby, "Radiocarbon Dates, II", *Science*, 1951, Volume 114, p. 291.


[43] Commenting on the "lack" of radiocarbon dating of the Qur'anic manuscripts, the Christian missionary Joseph Smith says:

To begin with, they test the age of the paper on which the manuscript is written, using such chemical processes as carbon-14 dating. This is adequate for recent documents such as the Qur'an, as precise dating of between +/-20 years is possible.

Perhaps this missionary is unaware that the "precision" of a $^{14}$C dating is based on confidence levels. The value of "precision" $\pm$20 years is meaningless when the confidence level, whether it is $1\sigma$ or $2\sigma$, is not specified.

[44] A. J. T. Jull, D. J. Donahue, M. Broshi & E. Tov, "Radiocarbon Dating Of Scrolls And Linen Fragments From The Judean Desert", ‘Atiqot, 1996, op. cit., Table I, p. 86. Table I gives the dating range for $1\sigma$ and $2\sigma$ confidence levels. The palaeographic dating is given in Table II on p. 88.

The results of the 1995 radiocarbon dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls were described as "too gross and iffy to settle any arguments". See H. Shanks, "New Carbon-14 Tests Leave Room For Debate", Biblical Archaeology Review, 1995, op. cit., p. 61.

[45] The rarity of radiocarbon dating for manuscripts is due to its inaccuracy and consequently its unenthusiastic support by palaeographers; therefore, it is rarely used. François Déroche says:

Establishing a date for the earliest copies is thus dependent upon palaeographic studies, dating the decorations or, in rare cases, upon scientific methods such as Carbon-14 dating.

Es wird oft gefragt, ob nicht derartige Untersuchungen zuverlässigere Ergebnisse brächten als die geisteswissenschaftlichen, und deshalb öfter herangezogen werden sollten. Dagegen spricht einmal, dass sie sehr kostspielig sind (die Bestimmung einer Probe kostet rund tausend Mark). Zum anderen ist die Unschärfe der Ergebnisse meist weitaus größer als in diesem Fall, und zumal bei Anwendung "traditioneller" Methoden.

Even more recently, one should take heed of Blair's insistence on utilising a more comprehensive approach than is currently the case, insisting that the adoption of multi-disciplinary sophistication will help to solve the disputes on dating early Qur'anic manuscripts. See S. S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 2006, op. cit., p. 128.


1. Introduction

The history of orientalism is quite peculiar. According to a few of them the history of Islam and Muslims is quite possibly a lie. They also claimed that Arabic sources on Islam are inherently unreliable whereas non-Islamic sources and speculative opinions are given an aura of truthfulness. As far as the Qur'an is concerned, it was not the revelation given to the Prophet, but simply a compilation of stolen liturgical material from the mass of Judeo-Christian and Zoroastrian traditions. One such example of an orientalist belonging to this class was that of Reverend Alphonse Mingana. Mingana attempted to teach Muslims about the transmission of their sacred Book down to even the Arabic alphabet! His hypothesis was that the Qur'an had strong imprints of Syriac. The "author" integrated a host of Syriac loan words into the language and thus brought about the linguistic revolution of what is now called the Qur'an. Mingana catalogued the alleged "Syriac" vocabulary in the Qur'an and argued for the widespread presence of Syriac Christianity and its important role in the origins of Islam. His work, along with the more comprehensive work of Arthur Jeffery's *The Foreign Vocabulary Of The Qur'an,* gave impetus for further research into the connection between the "foreign" vocabulary of the Qur'an and the historical circumstances of its appearance. Recently, Mingana's work was given a resurrection with a new twist by Christoph Luxenberg's *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache.*

As far as the origins of the Arabic language is concerned, Mingana claims complete ignorance about it. He goes on to claim that in Makkah and Madinah, the written language "must have been" either Syriac or Hebrew:

> If all the signs do not mislead us, very few oracular sentences, if any, were written in the time of the Prophet. The kind of life he led, and the rudimentary character of reading and writing in that part of the world in which he appeared, are sufficient witnesses in favour of this view. Our ignorance of the Arabic language in its early period of its evolution is such that we can not even know with certainty whether it had any writing of its own in Maccah and Madinah. If a kind of writing existed in these two localities it must have been something very similar to Estrangelo [i.e., Syriac] or the Hebrew character.
As for the Arabic vowels, he dismisses the value of Arab authors and instead relies on Aramaic writers and his own speculative opinions. He says:

The first discoverer of the Arabic vowels is unknown to history. The opinions of Arab authors, on this point, are too worthless to be quoted... If we may advance an opinion of our own, we think that a complete and systematic treatise on these vowels was not elaborated till the latter half of the VIIIth century, and we believe that such an attempt could have been successfully made only the under the influence of the school of Baghdâd, at its very beginning. On the one hand, besides the insufficiency of the grounds for assuming an earlier date, we have not a manuscript which can be shewn to be before that time, adorned with vowels; on the other hand, the dependence of these vowels on those of Aramaeans obliges us to find a centre where the culture of the Aramaic language was flourishing, and this centre is the school of Baghdâd, which was, as we have already stated, under the direction of Nestorian scholars, and where a treatise on Syriac grammar was written by the celebrated Hunain.

He also asserted that:

The foundation of the Arabic vowels is based on the vowels of Aramaeans. The names given to these vowels is an irrefragable proof of the veracity of this assertion. So the Phath corresponds in appellation and in sound to the Aramaic Phtâha....

Following closely in the footsteps of Mingana, Luxenberg claims that before the emergence of Arabic literature, the principal language of writing was syro-aramäische or Syriac. This lead him to assume that the origins of the literary Arabic and the Qur'an must be sought in Aramaic and Christian communities. This assumption is taken further to claim that Makkah was not an Arab settlement but an Aramaic colony and that the residents of Makkah spoke aramäische-arabisches Mischsprache. This language, apparently not known or understood outside of Makkah(?), soon went into a state of oblivion and no reliable tradition existed to prove its existence. Hence, according to Luxenberg, the early Muslim scholars, writing about a century and a half after the Prophet, were under the false impression that the Qur'an was written in classical Arabic; therefore, it was no surprise that they did not understand what they were reading. In this regard, Luxenberg represents a radical break from everyone else, including Jeffery and Mingana.

Under the cloak of these assumptions, Luxenberg begins his quest to find the "real" Qur'anic text using his own graphic and linguistic methods. It is his assumptions for the graphic side of his analysis that interests us in this paper. By claiming that the early Arabic documents lack diacritical points and vowel markers, Luxenberg takes liberty to alter diacritics and change the vowels at will.
Luxenberg's work has been given wide publicity by the *New York Times* (Alexander Stille and Nicholas Kristoff), *The Guardian* and *Newsweek*. Is his book a path-breaking discourse or is it yet another headline grabbing exercise? This has prompted us to evaluate the claims of Luxenberg and inspect the foundations which these claims rest upon. In this paper, we would like to examine the assumptions of Mingana and Luxenberg concerning the origins of various aspects of the Arabic script. We will also compare the Arabic script with the Syriac script and its development. It will be shown that both Mingana and Luxenberg were wrong in their assumptions concerning the Arabic script.

2. Origins Of The Arabic Script

As mentioned earlier, Mingana claimed ignorance about the evolution of the Arabic script and the presence of an Arabic alphabet during the advent of Islam. He then went on to say that in Makkah and Madinah, the written language "must have been" either Syriac or Hebrew. As for Luxenberg, he claims:

When the Koran was composed, Arabic did not exist as a written language; thus it seemed evident to me that it was necessary to take into consideration, above all, Aramaic, which at the time, between the 4th and 7th centuries, was not only the language of written communication, but also the lingua franca of that area of Western Asia.

We should also point out that Nabia Abbott also refuted the arguments of Mingana using the earliest known Arabic papyrus **PERF No. 558** [22 AH] originating from Egypt. If Arabic was indeed so primitive in its homeland during the advent of Islam, as claimed by Mingana, how can one rationalize its practical use in Egypt in such a short time and that too in a well-developed cursive script? Abbott says:

The condition of Arabic writing in Muhammad's time is indicated by **PERF No. 558** (our plates iv-v), an Arabic papyrus of the reign of 'Umar dated AH 22 and written in a fairly well developed manuscript hand in the distant province of Egypt, where Greek and Coptic were the written languages in general use. If written Arabic was so primitive and rare in its own homeland at the time of Muhammad's death, how do we account for its practical use in Egypt only a short dozen years after that event? Again to grant the incomplete development of orthography would give us reason to suspect only the orthographic accuracy of early Qur'anic editions but not the possibility of their existence. In this connection it is interesting to note that nowhere in the traditions of the earliest transmission of the Qur'an is there any hint of serious orthographic or vowel difficulties; rather it is the differences in the Arabic tribal dialects and differences arising out of foreigner's use of Arabic that seem to demand attention. The foregoing considerations lead one to believe that, if we allow for such common mistakes as writers and copyists are liable to make, the Arabic writers of Muhammad's time and of the time of early Caliphs
were able scribes capable of producing an acceptable edition of a written Qur'an despite the lack of all the improvements of modern written Arabic.\cite{17}

Luxenberg mentions the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions in Grohmann's classic *Arabische Paläographie*.\cite{18} Deducing from the early form of Arabic alphabets, he says that it is safe to assume the cursive *syro-aramäische* script [i.e., Syriac] served as a model for the Arabic script.\cite{19} What now becomes almost unbelievable is that Luxenberg uses Grohmann's *Arabische Paläographie* as a source to support his argument that the *syro-aramäische* script served as a model for the Arabic script. Grohmann in this book, in fact, was one of the earliest scholars to refute the origins of Arabic script from Syriac script.\cite{20} T. Nöldeke was the first to establish the link between the Nabataean and Arabic scripts in 1865, which later confirmed against J. Starcky's Syriac thesis by Grohmann. The affiliation between Nabataean and Arabic scripts has now been fully documented by J. Healey. He says:

The development of the Nabataean script in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. is usually seen as a progression from form derived from earlier Aramaic towards forms out of which the early (western cursive) Arabic script developed, though we should note the view of J. Starcky, based partly on the observation that Nabataean script, unlike the Syriac and Arabic scripts, is essentially suspended from an upper line, that the origin of the Arabic script is to be sought in a Lahmid form of the Syriac script. This view has met with little support. The Nabataean origin of the Arabic script is now almost universally accepted.\cite{21}

Similar conclusions were also reached by Nabia Abbott,\cite{22} Kees Versteegh\cite{23} and Beatrice Gruendler.\cite{24} One should also note that the origins of an early cursive Arabic script has nothing to do with the *syro-aramäische* script of Luxenberg; rather it is from the Nabataean script from where it originated. Now that Luxenberg's hypothesis of the *syro-aramäische* script being the "model" for the Arabic script is conclusively refuted, let us now move on to the origin of diacritical and vowel marks in Arabic script.

3. Diacritical & Vowel Marks In Arabic From Syriac?

The diacritical (or skeletal) and vowel marks in early days of Islam were termed as *nuqat* (or dots). Skeletal dots differentiate the graphemes or the letters sharing in the same skeleton such as ق from چ. These are known as *nuqat al-i’jām* and was familiar to the Arabs prior to the advent of Islam. The vowel marks or *nuqat al-i’rāb* (or *tashkīl*), which can take the form of dots or conventional markings, were invented by Abu al-Aswad al-Duali (d. 69 AH / 688 CE) as we shall see below.\cite{25} Let us now look into the issue of borrowing.
3.1 DIACRITICAL MARKS

It has been claimed by scholars, with some reservations, that the origins of diacritical and vowel marks originate from Syriac. With some reservations, the origins of diacritical and vowel marks originate from Syriac. [26] We have already seen the opinions of Mingana earlier. [27] Luxenberg opines that the diacritical dots for (dolath) and (rish) in Syriac may have served as the basis for the Arabic alphabet. [28]

In the Syriac alphabet, only two characters possess diacritical dots: (dolath) and (rish). By comparison, the Arabic alphabet contains a total of fifteen dotted characters: ،ب，ت،ث،ج،خ،ذ،ز،ش،ض،ظ،غ،ف،ق،ن،ة. Imagining that the Arabs borrowed their multitudinous dots from the Syriac becomes a difficult proposition. [29] Moreover, we have clear pre-Islamic evidence of the usage of diacritical dots, e.g., the Raqush Inscription [267 CE] has diacritical points on the letters ش،ت and ﺮ; the Jabal Ramm Inscription [4th century CE] has diacritical points for the letters ﺱ،ي and ﺛ; and a curious inscription from Sakakah contains dots associated with Arabic letters ت،ب and ﺛ،ب.

Coming to the time of the advent of Islam, the earliest dated papyrus PERF No. 558 [22 AH / 642 CE] shows numerous diacritical dots on the letters ﺱ،ب،ج،خ and ن in P. Mich. 6714 - a bilingual papyrus from 22 - 54 AH / 642 - 674 CE. There are also examples of diacritical dots in the Islamic inscriptions, e.g., an inscription at Wadi Sabil [46 AH / 666 CE] shows a dot below ﺑ; and an inscription near Ta'if on a dam built by Caliph Mu‘awiya [58 AH / 677 CE] shows the use of consonantal points for ﺭ،ب،ث،ي and ن،ب،ي،ت.

Given the fact that all of the above material was published before Luxenberg published his book, it is surprising to see his claim (quoting Blachère) that Islamic tradition is unable to pinpoint when the diacritical points were finally "fixed" - a process that took over three hundred years. [30] If we take evidence from the inscriptions and papyrus that predate ‘Uthman’s mushaf we find that there are ten dotted characters (out of fifteen) that have the same dot pattern as used today. Not surprisingly, Gruendler, a specialist in Arabic script, using the examples of inscriptions, papyri, and coins from early Islamic times, says:

The diacritic system had completed its development in the first half of the first Islamic century, although points (or strokes) were used selectively and sporadically - being regarded rather as an additional clarification than as an integral part of the alphabet. [31]

We know that the origins of Arabic script and the diacritical dots has nothing to do with the syro-aramäische script of Luxenberg. Consequently, it would not be too
surprising that the diacritics may have come from the Nabataean script to the Arabic script. Healey says:

... we may suspect that the concept of diacritics came to the Arabs with the Nabataean script, ...

It is clear that Luxenberg is already incorrect on two counts, i.e., the origin of the Arabic alphabet as well as the diacritical dots to differentiate between the letters sharing in the same skeleton. Let us now see how he fares over the issue of vowel marks.

3.2 VOWEL MARKS

As we have seen earlier, Mingana had claimed that the origin of Arabic vowels is unknown to history and said that the opinions of Arab authors are too "worthless" to be quoted. Instead he advanced his own "opinion" (worthless or otherwise) by saying that the foundation of the Arabic vowels is based on the vowels of the Syrians. The only proof offered by Mingana was the similarity in the names of vowels in Syriac and Arabic. The fathā of Arabic corresponds in appellation and in sound to the Aramaic phtâha.

Luxenberg, on the other hand, brings another dimension into the whole issue of vowel signs. He claims that the Arabic vowel system for the designation of the short vowels a, u and i by points, was after the model of the earlier syro-aramäische vocalization system. It is also claimed that the addition of dots for the short vowels at various locations was introduced in the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan [r. 685-705 CE]. Luxenberg applies his trial-and-error technique on the sab‘at ahruf of the Qur'an and connects it to the seven vowel signs of Syriac, the writing system developed by Jacob of Edessa [d. 708 CE]. Tabari [d. 310 AH / 923 CE] also mentions a tradition which says that there were five readings (i.e., khamsah ahruf) of the Qur'an, which Luxenberg suggests correspond to the five vowel signs of the Western Syrians.

The common theme in the arguments of both Mingana and Luxenberg is their use of speculation from which they claim the Syriac origins of Arabic vowels. In other words, the Syriac vocalization system was already in place before the Arabs borrowed it from them. They differ only in their use of the sources. Mingana rejects the opinions of the Arab authors as "worthless" whereas Luxenberg is all too happy to embrace the opinion of an Arab author to support his hypothesis of Syriac origins.

Let us first take the case of Mingana. His only proof for the claim that the foundation of the Arabic vowels is based on the vowels of Syrians is that the fathā of Arabic
corresponds in appellation and in sound to the Aramaic *phēṭāhā*. Jacob of Edessa [d. 708 CE] was the first person to introduce vowels in Western Syria.\[33\]

The use of the vowel names, however, appear in the thirteenth century CE in Bar Hebraeus' [d. 1286 CE] writings. It is assumed that Bar Hebraeus *may* have followed the terminology which had been in part introduced before by Jacob of Edessa, for the Syriac sources on detailing origins of Syriac orthography and grammar are *late*. Elias bar Sinaya [c. 11th century CE] was perhaps the first person to give the names to the vowels in Eastern Syria (Figure 1). In Western Syria, the five named Greek vowels appeared sometime after 839 CE, as suggested by the dated manuscripts.\[36\]
As for the Arabic vowels, Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali [d. 69 AH / 688 CE] was the first one to have invented them. Ibn al-Nadim [d. 385 AH / 995 CE] in his *Al-Fihrist* says:
Abu ‘Ubaydah narrated:

Abu al-Aswad derived grammar from ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, for whom there be peace, but he did not disclose to anyone what he had learned from ‘Ali, whose countenance may Allah honor, until Ziyad [the governor of Basrah from 45 to 53 AH] appointed him for the composition of something to serve as a guide to the people, so that they could understand the book of Allah. Abu al-Aswad asked to be excused from this task, until one time when he heard a reader recite, Allah is quit of the idolators and of His Apostle [Qur’an 9:3, reading rasulihi, which should have been read as God is quit of the idolators and so is His Apostle (reading rasuluhu)]. Then he said, "I never supposed that the condition of the people would come to this!" So he returned to Ziyad and said, "I will do what the emir has ordered. Let there be sought for me a scribe who is intelligent and obedient to what I say." They brought, therefore, a scribe from the ‘Abd al-Kays Tribe, but he [Abu al-Aswad] was not satisfied with him. Then they came with another one, about whom Abu al-‘Abbas al-Mubarrad said, "I regard him to be one of those [who are intelligent]." So Abu al-Aswad said [to the new scribe], "If you see that I open my mouth in pronouncing a letter, place a mark above, on top of it. If I close my mouth [making a u sound], place a mark in front of the letter, and if I split [my lips] double the mark." So this was the marking system of Abu al-Aswad. [38]

However, it is the Arabic original that details the dotting that is of interest here. Abu ‘Amr al-Dani says:

Muhammad Ibn Yazid al-Mubarrid said: When Abu al-Aswad ad-Du’ali formalized the grammar, he said: "Seek me a man skilled at taking notes." We looked for such a man, and could not find anyone except in (the tribe of) ‘Abd al-Qays. Abu al-Aswad told him: "When you see me pronounce a letter, if I bring my lips together [fa-dammatu], put a dot before the letter; if I bring my lips together [fa-dammatu] with nasalization, put two dots before it. If I lower my lips [kasrtu],
put a dot beneath the letter; if I lower my lips [kasru] with nasalization, put two dots beneath it. If you see me open my lips [fathu], put a dot above the letter; if I open my lips [fathu] with nasalization, put two dots above it.

Abu al-'Abbas (Al-Mubarrid) said: Hence the dotting in Basrah remains in ‘Abd al-Qays until now. [59]

Here we see that Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali [d. 69 AH / 688 CE] was responsible for the dot notation of the three vowels and the nunation and that the names of the vowels (fatha, damma and kasra) are connected with their articulation. Thus this first work of Arabic grammar was an attempt to describe the structure of the language, an accurate realization of the phonetic values of the short vowels.

Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali was the inventor of the vowels as well the names associated with their articulation. Furthermore, Abu al-Aswad's scheme of vowelling is also seen in some of the Qur'anic manuscripts from 1st/2nd century of hijra. Thus Mingana's claim that the foundation of Arabic vowels is based on the vowels of the Aramaeans becomes untenable. Moreover, we have already seen that the name phtâha did not enter the Syrian phraseology until around the middle of the 9th century; more than 150 years after the death of Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali. Furthermore, there are no corresponding appellations in Syriac for damma and kasra of the Arabic vowel system. Hence Mingana's use of phtâha, just a single vowel from Syriac, to claim that the Arabs borrowed their vowels from Syrians, is rather disingenuous.

Similarly, Luxenberg's claim that the designation of the short vowels a, u and i by points, was after the model of the earlier syro-aramäische vocalization system and that they first appeared in the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan does not hold any water either. In the case of Syriac, the period from the third to the beginning of the seventh century CE (i.e., until the advent of Islam) is marked by an almost exclusive use of the diacritical point. Only towards the end of this period did there begin to appear signs which denoted the vowels /e/ and /a/; prior to this development, no specific signs were employed for the various vowels. [40]

In Syriac, a point is placed either above or below the line and served a two-fold purpose. It was used (a) to differentiate between the uses of y, w, ’ and h as vowel letters and as consonant letters and (b) to differentiate between homographs. As for the latter, a point can also differentiate homographs which have two vowel phonemes in contrast: a upper point denotes a homograph which has a vowel of the /a/ group as its distinctive phoneme, while a lower point (or the absence of any point whatsoever) denotes a homograph which has a phoneme of the /i/ or /u/ group. [41] This is out-of-step with the claim of Luxenberg that the syro-aramäische vocalization system was used as a model for the designation of the short vowels /a/, /i/ and /u/ in the Arabic
script. The system of points in Syriac was clearly inadequate and resulted in the evolution of two vocalization systems, the Eastern (or Nestorian) and the Western (or Jacobite) as shown in Fig. 1.

Like Mingana, Luxenberg did not pay attention to the fact that the needs of the Arabic and Syriac vocalizations were fundamentally different. The vocalization systems of Syriac and Arabic had to cope with difficulties arising from the bivalent nature of certain letters which had both consonantal (or semivocalic) and vocalic values. The need to differentiate the former from the latter values existed in Arabic as well as Syriac; it was, however, more acute in the latter, i.e., the Syriac. In Arabic the situation is rather simple, since the letters ،ي، and ا (i.e., w, y, and ') serve as vowel letters as a rule only when they do not have any vocalization sign of their own. For Syriac, on the other hand, the differentiation between the two kinds of values in question could not be based upon any such automatic principle. Therefore, Syriac, unlike Arabic, had to develop other methods to achieve the differentiation of vowel and consonantal notation. Hence, it is not surprising to see that the Arabic vowel notation took a completely different route.

However, the course that Arabic vowel notation finally took differs considerably from that of both Aramaic and Hebrew. Of the Semitic languages which make use of vocalization signs, Arabic is the only one to denote in its orthography all of the long vowel phonemes but none of the short ones. Thus Arabic establishes a consistent and clear-cut opposition between its internal and external vowel notation - that is, between the values of its vowel letters and those of the respective vocalization signs.... this opposition in marking is correlated with a structural feature of language - the quantitative opposition of the vowel phonemes.

It is not surprising that the dotting scheme adopted by Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali was fundamentally different from that of Syriac. Abu al-Aswad's scheme denoted the short vowels (/a/, /i/ and /u/) and the nunation (/an/, /in/, /un/); as expected no long vowels (/aː/, /iː/ and /uː/) were touched upon as the Arabic orthography takes care of that. In contrast, in its most complete form the East Syrian orthography has the signs for /a/, /aː/, /e/, /eː/, /i/, /o/ and /u/. The West Syrian system, on the other hand, has signs for /a/, /ã/, /ã/, /i/ and /u/.

Let us now turn our attention to another issue raised by Luxenberg. Firstly, he presents two hadith traditions that deal with the differences of reading between the companions and their resolution by the Prophet. These traditions relate to the revelation of the Qur'an in the sab'at ahruf or the seven modes. This is represented by Luxenberg as the indeterminate nature of the Qur'an's consonantal text. He also argues that these are later stories which reflect what must have been a faint
recollection of the indeterminacy of the Arabic alphabet and hence the reading of the text, which the later scholars interpreted as *sab’at ahruf*. Secondly, using his heuristic methodology, Luxenberg argues that the *sab’at ahruf* of the Qur’an allowed by the Prophet are connected to the seven vowel signs of Syriac, the writing system developed by Jacob of Edessa. Furthermore, he cites a tradition quoted by Tabari which says that there were five readings (i.e., *khamsah ahruf*) of the Qur'an, which, he suggests, correspond to the five vowel signs of the Western Syrians.

The crux of the issue here revolves around the dating of the tradition of the revelation of the Qur'an in the *sab’at ahruf*. This will then tell us whether the hadith is early or late. If we plot the *isnad* (i.e., the chain of transmission) bundle of the hadith of ‘Ubayy b. K‘ab (as mentioned by Luxenberg), we should be able to draw some conclusions about the origins of this tradition of revelation of the Qur'an in the *sab’at ahruf*. The full text of the hadith reads:

_Ubayy b. Ka‘b reported: I was in the mosque when a man entered and prayed and recited (the Qur’an) in a style to which I objected. Then another man entered (the mosque) and recited in a style different from that of his companion. When we had finished the prayer, we all went to Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) and said to him: This man recited in a style to which I objected, and the other entered and recited in a style different from that of his companion. The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) asked them to recite and so they recited, and the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) expressed approval of their affairs (their modes of recitation). And there occurred in my mind a sort of denial which did not occur even during the Days of Ignorance. When the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) saw how I was affected (by a wrong idea), he struck my chest, whereupon I broke into sweating and felt as though I were looking at Allah with fear. He (the Holy Prophet) said to me: Ubayy, a message was sent to me to recite the Qur’an in one dialect, and I replied: Make (things) easy for my people. It was conveyed to me for the second time that it should be recited in two dialects. I again replied to him: Make affairs easy for my people. It was again conveyed to me for the third time to recite in seven dialects. And (I was further told): You have got a seeking for every reply that I sent you, which you should seek from Me. I said: O Allah! forgive my people, forgive my people, and I have deferred the third one for the day on which the entire creation will turn to me, including even Ibrahim (peace be upon him) (for intercession).

The *isnad* bundle of ‘Ubayy's hadith in the well-known collections of *hadiths* is given below.[45]
This *hadith* and its variants in the form of a slightly shorter text or a change in wording are extensively recorded in the well-known collections of Ahmad ibn Hanbal [d. 241 AH / 855 CE] in his *Musnad*, Muslim [d. 261 AH / 874 CE] in his *Sahih*, Abu Dawud [d. 275 AH / 888 CE] in his *Sunan* and al-Nasa'i [d. 303 AH / 915 CE] in his *Sunan*. They all predate Tabari [d. 310 AH / 923 CE]. However, one can argue that the tradition of the revelation of the Qur'an in the *sab'at ahruf* is not present in collections earlier than the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. This can be countered by saying there exist *independent* traditions from ‘Umar b. al-Khattab and ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbas from the Prophet that mention the revelation of the Qur'an in the *sab'at ahruf*. The *hadith* from ‘Umar b. al-Khattab reads:

**Narrated 'Umar bin Al-Khattab:**

I heard Hisham bin Hakim reciting Surat Al-Furqan during the lifetime of Allah's Apostle and I listened to his recitation and noticed that he recited in several different ways which Allah's Apostle had not taught me. I was about to jump over him during his prayer, but I controlled my temper, and when he had completed his prayer, I put his upper garment around his neck and seized him by it and said, "Who taught you this Sura which I heard you reciting?" He replied, "Allah's Apostle taught it to me." I said, "You have told a lie, for Allah's Apostle has taught it to me in a different way from yours." So I dragged him to Allah's Apostle and said (to Allah's Apostle),

"I heard this person reciting Surat Al-Furqan in a way which you haven't taught me!" On that Allah's Apostle said, "Release him, (O 'Umar!) Recite, O Hisham!" Then he recited in the same way as I heard him reciting. Then Allah's Apostle said, "It was revealed in this way," and added, "Recite, O 'Umar!" I recited it as he had taught me. Allah's Apostle then said, "It was revealed in this way. This Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven different ways, so recite of it whichever (way) is easier for you (or read as much of it as may be easy for you)."

The *isnad* bundle of this *hadith* and its variants in the form of a slightly shorter text or a change in wording is drawn below.
This tradition of the revelation of the Qur'an in the *sab'at ahruf* through ‘Umar was recorded by Ma’mar b. Rashad[46] [*d. 153 AH / 770 CE*] in his *Jami’*, Malik b. Anas [*d. 179 AH / 795 CE*] in his *Muwatta*,[45] al-Shafi‘i [*d. 204 AH / 819 CE*] in his *Musnad*, Ahmed ibn Hanbal [*d. 241 AH / 855 CE*] in his *Musnad*, Bukhari [*d. 256 AH / 870 CE*] in his *Sahih*, Muslim [*d. 261 AH / 874 CE*] in his *Sahih*, Abu Dawud [*d. 275 AH / 888 CE*] in his *Sunan*, al-Tirmidhi [*d. 279 AH / 892 CE*] in his *Sunan* and al-Nasa'i [*d. 303 AH / 915 CE*] in his *Sunan*.

This *isnad* bundle shows that the earliest known occurrence of this *hadith* is in a collection of Ma’mar b. Rashad. In other words, this *hadith* was already known and in circulation in the first half of the second Islamic century, if we consider the death of Ma’mar as a *terminus post quem*.

Is that the final word on the dating of this *hadith*? It is also interesting to note that the *isnads* in the above bundle intersect at Muhammad b. Muslim, i.e., Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri [*d. 124 AH / 741 CE*]. He is the common link. This is also corroborated by studying the *isnad* as well as by comparing different *matns* (i.e., the text of the *hadith*) as seen in various collections.[48] A very short *matn* of the *sab’at ahruf hadith* also exist that has al-Zuhri as the common link:

*Narrated Ibn Abbas: Allah's Apostle said, "Gabriel read the Qur'an to me in one way (i.e. dialect) and I continued asking him to read it in different ways till he read it in seven different ways."*
One can claim that al-Zuhri might have invented the sab’at ahruf tradition and circulated it widely as he was the common link.\[49\] However, there are arguments which speak against the assumption that al-Zuhri invented them outright.\[50\] This is because he received information not only from ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr \[d. 94 AH / 712 CE\] but also ‘Ubaydullah b. ‘Abdullah \[d. 126 AH / 743 CE\]. ‘Urwa received the hadith from ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Abd al-Qari and al-Masoor b. Mukhramah; they both heard it from ‘Umar b. al-Khattab. ‘Ubaydullah on the other hand, heard it from ‘Abd al-Hamid b. ‘Abbas. Hence we have two traditions from al-Zuhri going back to two
different companions of the Prophet as two different chains. Furthermore, if we compare the two traditions of the revelation of the Qur'an in the sab'at ahruf from ‘Ubayy and ‘Umar, al-Zuhri is absent in the isnad of the former. This again corroborates that al-Zuhri, being the common link in the hadith from ‘Umar, could not have been the forger of the hadith of the revelation of the Qur'an in the sab'at ahruf. In other words, we can safely conclude that the hadiths of the revelation of the Qur'an in the sab'at ahruf were already in circulation in the first Islamic century before the death of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr [d. 94 AH / 712 CE].

If we compare this dating with the fruits of Luxenberg's heuristic methodology suggesting that the sab'at ahruf are connected to the seven vowel signs of Syriac, the writing system developed by Jacob of Edessa [d. 708 CE], we find that the connection between sab'at ahruf and the seven vowels of Syriac is patently false. What has the recitation of a book in seven modes got to do with the seven vowels of Syriac? Nothing. Furthermore, Jacob of Edessa's scheme of vowels did not gain any currency among the West Syrians and remained unexpressed until Bar Hebraeus [d. 1286 CE]. The precise vowel sounds of Jacob's scheme continued, however, to remain unexpressed in writing by the West Syrians. His innovations, as he had expected, were not accepted into the conventional alphabet. They do not appear in any manuscripts except those of his grammar, and they are ignored until the time of the industrious Bar Hebraeus. Why was Jacob's experiment never more than a gallant interlude? We can only surmise. Perhaps Syrian conservatism rebelled against the tampering with the traditional form of the Bible text, which was the very foundation of all literary, as of all theological, activity in Syriac. Perhaps the new system would have disrupted too violently the fundamental structure of verbal and nominal ground-forms....

Are we supposed to expect that a vowel scheme that did not even gain currency in West Syria in Jacob's time to have influenced the tradition of the revelation of the Qur'an in the sab'at ahruf? Contemplating the full spectrum of evidence available to us, the answer is clearly no!

It should also be mentioned that Abu al-Aswad's scheme was transmitted by Yahya b. Ya'mar [d. 90 AH / 708 CE], Nasr b. ‘Asim al-Laythi [d. 100 AH / 718 CE] and Maimum al-Aqran. It was al-Khalil b. Ahmad al-Fraheedi [d. 170 AH / 786 CE] who finally replaced the pattern of dots with specific shapes for the three short vowels; a small َ for the vowel /u/, a small ٠ for the vowel /a/, and a small part of ی for the vowel /i/. He also changed the sign of shadda, using a small ظ. Al-Khalil's scheme gained rapid popularity and as Versteegh puts it:

With al-[K]halil's reform, the system of Arabic orthography was almost completed and, apart from a very few additional signs, it has remained essentially the same ever since.
On the other hand, as we have observed, the standardization of the vocalisation system in Western and Eastern Syria was less rapid than that of Arabic.

### 3.3 DOTTING IN THE EARLY QUR’ANIC MANUSCRIPTS

Since diacritical marks were already fixed before the first half of the first century of hijra and the vowel marks invented a little later by Abu al-Aswad al-Du’ali [d. 69 AH / 688 CE], it should not be surprising to see the Muslims towards the end of first century of hijra were already using the dotted manuscripts. Abu ‘Amr al-Dani narrates a couple of reports that shed some light into this matter.

It was to us narrated that Ibn Sirin owned a mushaf that was dotted by Yahya Ibn Ya’mur [d. 90 AH / 708 CE]. And that Yahya was the first one to dot them. The three of these people are among the eminent successors of Basra.\(^{[53]}\)

The other report says:

Khalaf b. Ibrahim said: Ahmad al-Makki told me: Al-Qasim told me: ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Mahdi told me from Hammad b. Zayd; from Khalid al-Hadda: I used to follow a mushaf from Ibn Sirin [d. 110 AH / 728 CE] that was dotted.\(^{[54]}\)

It should be added that every centre appears to have practiced a slightly different convention at first. For example, Ibn Ushta reports that the mushaf of Isma’il al-Qust [100-170 AH / 718-786 CE], the imam of Makkah bore a dissimilar dotting scheme when compared with the ones used by the Iraqis.\(^{[55]}\) The scholars of Sana’a followed yet another framework.\(^{[56]}\) However, by the close of the first century, the Basran convention became so popular that even the Madinan scholars adopted it.\(^{[57]}\) It is not surprising to see that some of the Qur’anic manuscripts from 1st/2nd century of hijra show the evidence of a vowelling scheme adopted by Abu al-Aswad al-Du’ali. The frequency of diacritic dots and vowels signs varies and alongside fully-vowelled manuscripts one can find texts in which even the diacritic dots are left out.
4. The Cover Story

Should Luxenberg's book be judged by its cover?

![Image of Luxenberg's book cover]

It is strange that a book that boasts a title *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qur'an - A Contribution to the Deciphering of Qur'anic Language) has a cover page...
that does not commensurate its title. One would expect that the author would have unearthed an important piece of evidence in the form of a manuscript, or an inscription to show the evidence of syro-aramäische reading of the Qur'an. Such an evidence on the cover page of the book would have befittingly matched the flowery title. However, to everyone’s surprise the title page is from a first century Qur'anic manuscript MS. Arabe 328a located at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. A facsimile copy of this manuscript was published by Déroche and Noseda in 1998.

This manuscript is written in a hijazi script, with no vowels and rare diacritical points. Even more damaging to the thesis of Luxenberg is that a recent study on this manuscript has concluded that this hijazi manuscript is written in the qira’at of Ibn ‘Amir [d. 118 AH / 736 CE] - one of the readings later to be declared indisputably mutawatir by Ibn Mujahid [d. 324 AH / 926 CE]. Even though there are no vowel marks and a rare diacritical mark in MS. Arabe 328(a), there is the consonantal outline of the text and, in a series of fragments as extensive as these, there are, fortunately, enough consonantal variants to enable the precise determination of the reading.

A related manuscript to MS. Arabe 328(a) is MS. Or. 2165 at the British Library, London. They both lack vowels. Unlike MS. Arabe 328(a), in MS. Or. 2165, the consonants are relatively frequently differentiated by dashes, thus allowing the identification of several more variants where a single consonantal shape is pointed in a distinctive way. The study by Dutton has shown that this manuscript is remarkably similar to first century manuscript MS. Arabe 328a in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and was written in the qira’at of Ibn ‘Amir. Based on the similarity between MS. Arabe 328a and MS. Or. 2165, he suggests re-dating this manuscript to the time just before Umayyad Caliph Walid [r. 86-96 AH], i.e., within the period 30-85 AH with the latter end of this time scale being safer. Other early Qur’anic manuscripts up to 3rd century of hijra that show the evidence of the qira’at are KFQ93 (2nd century AH), KFQ28 (3rd century AH), KFQ19 (3rd century AH) and KFQ16 (3rd/4th century AH), all of them at the Nasser David Khalili Collection Of Islamic Art, London, United Kingdom. We should also add Sibawayhi's [d. 170-180 AH] interest in the qira’at, whether attributed to any authority, or purely hypothetical. This interest did not clash with Sibawayhi’s respect for the already established Qur’anic text. Brockett concludes from his study of Qur'an readings in Sibawayhi's Kitab:

that while this earlier stage was far freer from tradition and far less systematised, it was nevertheless one in which the Qur'an text was firmly set within surprisingly narrow bounds.

According to Luxenberg, the Arabic alphabet used in the Qur'an began as some kind of shorthand, a mnemonic device not intended as a complete key to the sounds of the
language. He then concludes that the transmission of the text from Muhammad was not likely an oral transmission by memory, contrary to one of the chief claims of Islamic tradition. Assuming that this is true, then how does one explain the early evidence of the qira'at in the Qur'anic manuscripts right from the first century of hijra? For Luxenberg's theory to work, the Qur'an has to be two different things at the same time: on the one hand, a paleographically frozen seventh century document that represents the work of Muhammad, and on the other, a garbled text that has been modified by later Muslim scholars who were clueless as to its meaning. It can't be both at the same time. Moreover, we have already seen that the Muslims in the first century of hijra were already involved in diacritical marks as well as vocalization of the Qur'an to ensure the correct transmission of the Qur'an in written as well as in oral form. Furthermore, Whelan's study of the Qur'anic inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock and the literary sources mentioning the Qur'anic inscriptions in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah and the presence of professional copyists of the Qur'an has already demonstrated the evidence of codification of the Qur'an in the 7th century or the first century of hijra. Given these facts, Luxenberg's position of an unstable Qur'anic text in the first two centuries of hijra becomes untenable.

5. Now The Evidence!

The basic premise of Luxenberg's book, namely that the Qur'an was written in a hybrid Arabic-Aramaic language and borrows from Christian Aramaic writings - is dedicated to giving examples from the Qur'an to support this premise. The argument is essentially circular. In order to document his big idea of the Qur'an being an Arabic-Aramaic document that draws on Christian Aramaic texts, he ignored whatever did not fit - a common problem with holders of grand ideas. This has resulted in him making claims that are contrary to well-established facts such as the syro-aramäische script served as a model for the Arabic script and that the Arabic vocalization was based on the model of the earlier syro-aramäische vocalization system.

To further his grand ideas about the Qur'an, Luxenberg claimed that Makkah was not an Arab settlement but an Aramaic colony and that the residents of Makkah spoke aramäische-arabische Mischsprache. He also claimed that Aramaic, just before the advent of Islam, was not only the language of written communication, but also the lingua franca of that area of Western Asia.

On the contrary, Arabic was a lot more widespread in the Middle East before Islam than Luxenberg allows for, and we have sufficient evidence for this in the form of inscriptions (Figure 3).
The geographical spread of pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions range from Zebed from the Syriac speaking heartland in the north to Mada'in Salih in the south and from Abu Darag (Egypt) in the West to Sakakah in the East. Syrian Aramaic or the Syriac was the language which Luxenberg says the Qur'an was partially written in. The bulk of the pre-Islamic Syriac inscriptions are confined to the Edessa region in modern south Turkey. It is certainly a long way from the hijaz region and in particular Makkah! The pre-Islamic Syriac inscriptions south of Damascus are almost non-existent (an exception being the one at Jabal Usays, south east of Damascus), except those written by travellers or pilgrims.

Aramaic was not as widespread by the late sixth century CE contrary to what Luxenber Live replaced it in many areas as the principal lingua franca of the Middle East. After Alexander opened the Near East to Greek language and culture, the distribution of Hellenism throughout the cities and countryside was irreversible. By the time Islam arrived on the world scene, Greek had already became the predominant language of Western Asia. Bowersock points out that:

... the powerful impact of Greek culture can be seen everywhere a few centuries later in the early Roman imperial province of Syria. The caravan city of Palmyra was completely bilingual... But in the villages and rural areas of central and southern Syria, Greek can once again be seen as the language of local piety, uniting worshippers from shrines and holy places that lay far apart. It is too little appreciated that in general Greek inscriptions are far more common in the countryside of late antique Syria than Syriac ones... On the eve of Islam, Hellenism continued to be a powerful force. Greek-speaking Christians had never been able to set themselves altogether free from it, and Syriac-speaking Christians discovered that they could not exist without incorporating it into their literature and language.

This is self-evident when one surveys the material, especially the Greek inscriptions, where around 90% of those from the sixth-century Near East are in Greek. Syro-Aramaic or Syriac, the language which Luxenberg says the Qur'an was partially written in, was principally spoken in the Edessa region, modern south Turkey, a long way from the hijaz region and in particular Makkah. The shaded areas in Figure 4 show very approximately the regions where Aramaic was used during the time when it flourished from c. 900 BCE to the Arab conquest and where the Aramaeans (i.e., Syriac speakers) are known with fair certainty to have settled in this period. The
evidence is provided by external references to the Aramaeans and distinctive Aramaean names and religion. It is seen that there is a discrepancy between the two features. In large areas where Aramaic was used it is clear that the native populations were not Aramaean. The Persians and Parthians are the clearest example and Indian rulers also used Aramaic.

Comparing Figs. 3 and 4 we again find that most of the Syriac speakers (i.e., Aramaeans) were confined in between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and to the west of Euphrates; lying across the modern frontier of Turkey and Syria. Although Figs. 3 and 4 were drawn using different sources, they correspond very well and thereby provide corroborative evidence.
The closest to Arabic inscriptions in terms of geography are the Nabataean inscriptions and this proximity makes Luxenberg's hypothesis of syro-aramäische reading of the Qur'an untenable as we shall soon see. The Nabataeans were in fact Arabs and they spoke a non-Aramaic north Arabic dialect akin to the Classical Arabic.\(^{[77]}\) The Nabataean Aramaic was effectively a Schriftsprache, i.e., the language of the inscriptions. The early Arabic inscriptions such as the ‘En ‘Avdat inscription \([c. 125 \text{ CE}]\) and the Namarah inscription \([328 \text{ CE}]\) were written in the Nabataean Aramaic script but in the Arabic language. The Raqush inscription \([267 \text{ CE}]\) is the earliest dated Arabic text with Aramaic archaisms. This shows that the Arabs were familiar with Aramaic. The distinctive feature of Nabataean by comparison with other Aramaic dialects is its Arabic colouring or, to be precise, colouring from an Arabian language allied in some way to what became Classical Arabic.\(^{[78]}\) Healey notes that some other early though undated Nabataean inscriptions may in fact be in Arabic and that some of the thousands of Nabataean graffiti are arguably in Arabic.\(^{[79]}\) Aramaic had been very important in the hijaz as early as the fifth/fourth centuries BC as seen from a stela from Tayma in northern Saudi Arabia inscribed in Aramaic.\(^{[80]}\) So, it would be surprising if there were not quite a number of Aramaic words in the hijazi dialect of Arabic, and that does not make it a mixed language.

Most, if not all, of the socio-historical context of the origins of Islam can be explained by considering the Nabataean milieu. In the hijaz, we principally have Nabataean inscriptions, and these do not seem to be Christian at all in their content.\(^{[81]}\) The Nabataeans worshipped idols of gods and goddesses such as Dushara, Allat, al-‘Uzza, Manat, Hubal, \(\text{et al.}\) some of which were also worshipped by Arab tribes such as Quraysh in the hijaz as mentioned in the Qur'an and in the Islamic literary sources.\(^{[82]}\) A Syro-Aramaic Christian milieu would have a hard time explaining this socio-historic context. The Nabataean origins of the Arabic script further strengthens the case for a Nabataean milieu.

6. Syriac In The Early Islamic Centuries

Mingana and Luxenberg have claimed that since Syriac provided the literary exemplars from which Muhammad (or the early compilers?) worked, Syriac grammar and vocabulary should be used to interpret it. This comes from their assumption, whether stated openly or tacitly, that Syriac unlike Arabic was older and hence was already fixed in orthography, lexicography and grammar. According to Mingana:

As we believe the Kur'an to be the first Arabic book, its author had to contend with immense difficulties. He had to adapt new words and new expressions to fresh ideas, in a language that was not yet fixed by any grammar or lexicography... so the author of the Kur'an has exhibited stylistic idiosyncrasies
which stamp his work as being somewhat different from the classical Arabic known to us from the eighth century downwards; his style suffers from the disabilities that always characterise a first attempt in a new literary language which is under the influence of an older and more fixed literature. This older and more fixed literature is, in our judgment, undoubtedly Syriac more than any other.\[83\]

It is true that the Qur'an exhibits certain stylistic features not seen in the pre-Islamic poetry. However, to claim that this is different from the Classical Arabic of eighth century Arabia is problematic.

On the other hand, Luxenberg's _aramäische-arabische Mischsprache_ is an ill-defined concept and this has given him an excuse to claim that the normal rules of neither of the Arabic and Aramaic applies in a particular passage of Qur'anic text. This frees him to make conjectures at whim about the meaning of a particular passage in the Qur'an, even though those suggestions would otherwise be rejected as ungrammatical. The hypothesis of a _aramäische-arabische Mischsprache_ or a "mixed language" appears to be little more than a convenient excuse for high-handed interpretation of the Qur'anic text. As one can see, this hypothesis leads to more problems, historically and linguistically, than it claims to solve. Like Mingana, one of the biggest drawbacks of Luxenberg's hypothesis is its inability to explain the origins of Classical Arabic. If one stays within the bounds of the Nabataean milieu, the pre-Islamic existence of Classical Arabic is easily documentable using the well-studied Namarah inscription.

Classical Arabic has its origins pre-dating the Islamic period. The Namarah inscription [328 CE] is one of the earliest inscriptions so far discovered in the classical Arabic language and is written in Nabataean script. Bellamy, who had studied this inscription, concludes by saying:

... we have added a century and a half to the life of classical Arabic. This should come as no surprise since the conservatism of the Arabic language is well known.\[84\]

The ‘En ‘Avdat inscription [c. 125 CE], even earlier than the Namarah inscription was apparently written in Classical Arabic. Furthermore, the two pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from Jabal Ramm [4th century CE] and Umm al-Jimal [5th / 6th century CE] have grammar that is straightforward classical Arabic. The language in these inscriptions is closer to modern Arabic than the language of Shakespeare is to modern English.\[85\] What can be concluded is that classical Arabic has its origins even before the second century CE and has remained fixed even before the advent of Islam.
Just because some language is older, it does not automatically lead us to the conclusion that the orthography, lexicography and grammar of that language was "fixed" unless there is firm evidence. This is true for Syriac as we shall see.

5.1 SYRIAC ORTHOGRAPHY & GRAMMAR

The first systematic treatment of Syriac orthography and grammar was done by Jacob of Edessa [d. 708 CE]. His work is known only from a brief mention by Bar Hebraeus and some fragments discovered in Oxford and London.\[86\]

We are told in the first fragment that Jacob had been asked by a correspondent to invent vowel letters for Syriac. He replies that others had already considered this. A Greek grammarian had, he states, declared that the Greek alphabet at one time consisted of seventeen letters only; it had gradually been expanded to twenty-four with the introduction of vowel letters. But the desire to do the same for Syriac had been restrained by the fear of "destroying all the Scriptures that had been written up to that time in this imperfect script of the Syriac language". Jacob, torn between a wish to accede to his friend's request and the caution of his predecessors, resorted to a compromise. He invented vowel letters to be written, like the letters of the alphabet, upon the line. But they were to be applied only in this treatise to illustrate morphological forms in Syriac; they are not intended to be a permanent feature of the language. Jacob decided that the vowel letters are to be added only to illustrate the sense and the arrangement of these morphological rules, so that they will demonstrate the variation and the pronunciation of the sounds. They are not added in order to perfect or improve the script. Jacob enlarges on the inadequacy of the system of writing, declaring that Syriac can be read correctly only by guessing or by learning the traditional enunciation or after laborious study.\[87\] He says:

And, as I have already said, one cannot read anything accurately without those three things which have already been mentioned above - either, I repeat, by guess-work because of appropriateness (to the passage) and the sense required by the reading of the context in which it occurs; or from tradition handed down by others who were well-acquainted in the past with that context and its variant readings and could pronounce its sounds accurately and have handed down (this ability) to others - not on account of accuracy in reading the letters, for the letters have no quality of accuracy, but because they themselves have received the tradition from others; or by dint of great labour as one passes swiftly and, as it were, flies in reciting these passages, with the various marks of the points assisting and indicating the various meanings, so that those who receive the traditional (method of reading) do not understand the passage from the letters but from the enunciation of the sounds by the lips of the person transmitting the tradition.\[88\]
In his well-known letter to George of Sarug, Jacob rebukes the copyists of his time for their ignorance and carelessness:

I prohibit all those, who may copy the books, which I have translated or composed, from changing of their own accord anything of those which they have undertaken to copy, either in writings, or in the points, whatsoever they may find; if even a manifest error be found, for everyman is liable to error, ourselves, the scribe, who hath received the book from us, those who compare copy with copy, the eye of the reader which errs and deviates from correct vision....

With respect to the position of the points also, every man takes authority to himself to place them as he pleases... which is nothing but deformity, odiousness and ugliness that a natural and living body should be deprived of those members which have been given to it by nature.... Again there is something absurd and ugly when the face or the head of a man is found to have three ears or three eyes or any other redundant member.... But this is the beauty of nature that there be in it neither superfluity nor defect. Every one of the member should be made fit for the place, which has been prepared and rendered convenient for it by nature....

Similarly it may be seen with respect to the placing of the points, which are distinguishing and explanatory of the various things which are placed in this Mesopotamian, or Edessene, or, to speak more distinctly, Syriac Book; not in abundance or superfluity, nor where a member has no need to be distinguished from another which is similar to it in the letters, is it right that points should be placed; nor that they should be thick, and like to hands and feet in each of which there are six digits. Neither should they be deficient or fewer than the portion by which a member may, if possible, be distinguished from the others, which are like it; because that as superfluity, it has been observed, is not becoming, so also deficiency is not becoming. It is right that they be also put in places, which are convenient for them, and not where there is a vacant place, whether it be suitable or unsuitable.[89]

Indeed, he remarks,[90]

all the West (Syrians) and others living in other districts do not even speak this Edessene language correctly, since they do not understand the principle

which governs the system of writing.

Even some of the Edessenes, those, that is, who speak this Mesopotamian language (most) correctly, cannot read correctly not only those foreign sounds from outside their own language which they use but even these native sounds.

They certainly, Jacob continues, could not pronounce or read words adopted into Syriac from Hebrew, Greek, Byzantine or Persian. This is due to the lack of letters to represent all the sounds used.
As far as the Syriac orthography after the advent of Islam is concerned, Jacob of Edessa's correspondences give ample evidence of its poor state, not to mention the incorrect speaking and understanding of the language. The Syriac script during the time of Jacob and after the advent of Islam was clearly scriptio defectiva as opposed to the assumptions of Mingana and Luxenberg that it was scriptio plena. Now if the Aramaeans were not even able to read and write their own language correctly even after the advent of Islam, how can we know what they allegedly wrote that finally became the "Qur'an", was indeed what they actually meant?

As far as the earliest stages of Syriac grammar is concerned, our information about it is scarce. Most of what we know about the terminology of the early Syriac grammarians (e.g., Jacob of Edessa) is derived from the reports in the later writers, such as Bar Hebraeus [d. 1286 CE], and it is likely that their terminology reflects Arabic influence rather than a genuinely indigenous development. Versteegh says:

Unfortunately, we do not know very much about the earliest attempts of the Syrians in grammar and reading, in the sixth and seventh centuries. Most of what we know is derived from later Syriac writings, which were, however, composed at a time when the Syriac tradition had undergone the influence of Arabic grammar, and had taken over most of the conceptual and terminological apparatus of that tradition. As a matter of fact, both Syriac and Hebrew grammatical terminology, as we know it, are a calque of the Arabic terminology.[91]

Unfortunately for Mingana and Luxenberg, their assumptions of Syriac orthographical and grammatical influences on Arabic fall flat on their faces.

Let us now turn our attention to Syriac lexicography.

5.2 SYRIAC LEXICOGRAPHY

Hunain b. Ishaq [d. 873 CE] composed the first proper Syriac dictionary based on the alphabetical order. He laid the foundations of the Syriac lexicography.[92] At the end of the 9th century, Zacharias of Merv supplemented it by adding further entries, but it was a confused work. Isho' Bar ‘Ali, Hunain's pupil, wrote a new dictionary based on it and is available in print.[93] In it, Syriac words are followed by Arabic equivalents or definitions. Occasionally, further Syriac explanations are added. The fullest and most famous Syriac dictionary was that of Bar Bahlul (10th century).[94] It can be described as a sort of encyclopedia and is a Syriac-Arabic lexicon with both Syriac and Arabic used for the explanation of a word. As in much Arabic lexicography, authorities are mentioned for words included.
As for Mingana and Luxenberg, their hypothesis is based on an assumption that the Aramaeans were well advanced in their lexicography while the Arabs had a difficult time in understanding their own language, especially the Qur'an. We know that this is not true. The first Syriac dictionary appeared well after the advent of the first Arabic dictionary of al-Khalil b. Ahmed (i.e., *Kitab al-ʿAyn*) among others (Fig. 5).[85]

By the time Hunain composed his first dictionary, there was already intense lexicographical activity among the Arabs. What is even more interesting is that the Syriac dictionaries of ‘Isho Bar ‘Ali and Bar Bahlul uses Arabic to explain equivalents and definitions as shown in Fig. 6.
نبيث محفوف. مخلل 3 بهاء 4 حبله جنيه 5 نجمة 6. مخلل لهب
بسببه مؤ. اذا قيل على البدن 6 جميع 7 ينود ويرتعش ويتعرّب وعلى القلب يتبطل. 8
ب مكره 9. مكره مقلتته. الملأانون والنواقي 10. اذا كانوا في مراكب البحر 11. قيل
لهم النواحي والنباتية 12. يعطرون 13
ب حذف. يعطوون 14
ب حذف. مشك. 15
ب حذف. بعدهم 16. يسكن ويهدأ 18. يستقر.
ب حذف. يستول ويغلق 21.
ب حذف. يجه. 22
Figure 6: (a) The lexicon of Isho’ Bar Ali showing the meaning of Syriac words in Arabic and (b) the lexicon of Bar Bahlul showing the means of Syriac words in both Arabic and Syriac.⁹⁶

Taking into consideration that with the rise of Islam the use of Syriac eclipsed in the Middle East, it is surprising to see Aramaeans using Arabic to explain the meanings of the words in their lexicon. If Luxenberg’s tacit assumption of the superiority of Syriac lexicography was indeed correct then we would expect the Aramaeans to use Syriac to explain their words. On the contrary, we find that both Isho’ Bar ‘Ali and Bar Bahlul make use of Arabic extensively to explain the words in Syriac. All this suggests that by the time Hunain b. Ishaq arrived, Arabic lexicography was already well-developed and far more sophisticated than the Syriac lexicography. As quipped by Renan, the chief literary characteristic of Syriac is mediocrity, and the chief claim to fame of the Syrians is that they passed on the lore of the Greeks to the Arabs.⁹⁷ Haywood points out that:
Thus we see in Syriac lexicography signs of indebtedness to the Arabs, even though there is little evidence of direct imitation. As in Hebrew, grammar and grammatical terminology show similar influence.\(^{[98]}\)

It is surprising that Luxenberg uses the lexicons of Payne Smith and Brockelmann, which are primarily based on the lexicons of ‘Isho Bar ‘Ali and Bar Bahlul,\(^{[99]}\) the latter two compiled more than 250 years after the advent of Islam and about 100 years after the production of first Arabic lexicon, to show the alleged Syro-Aramaic reading of the Qur'an.

7. Conclusions

In the last thirty years or so, many revisionistic theories have been proposed as to how the Qur'an/Islam came about. According to these various revisionistic schools of thought, Islam was originally a Jewish sect (\textit{pace} Hagarism); the Qur'an was contemporaneous with the \textit{sira} (\textit{pace} Wansbrough); Islam arose in the Negev desert somehow allegedly validating Wansbrough's hypothesis (\textit{pace} Nevo); the Qur'an came after the \textit{sira} and \textit{hadith} (\textit{pace} Rubin); the Qur'an was an Iraqi product and predates the \textit{sira} (\textit{pace} Hawting) and, recently, the Qur'an is a product of Syriac Christianity (\textit{pace} Luxenberg). It seems that these revisionistic schools often follow methodologies that do not agree with each other (whether in whole or in part) and none of them seem to agree on any one particular scenario, be it historical, social, cultural, political, economic or religious. Something that appears to be more fundamental in their analysis is that the revisionists are willing to formulate any theory to lend verisimilitude to their opinions concerning the Qur'an/Islam, no matter how much it contradicts all of the available well-established evidence, documentary or otherwise. In this regard we discover that Luxenberg is no different. This is precisely what has been point out by Robert Hoyland recently. While discussing the corpus of documentary evidence for early Islam and its almost total absence in the work of Christoph Luxenberg among others, he says:

\textit{Firstly, we do have a number of bodies of evidence - especially non-Muslim sources, papyri, inscriptions and archaeological excavations - that can serve as a useful external referent and whose riches are only just beginning to be exploited in a systematic manner. Secondly, the historical memory of the Muslim community is more robust than some have claimed. For example, many of the deities, kings and tribes of the pre-Islamic Arabs that are depicted by ninth-century Muslim historians also feature in the epigraphic record, as do many of the rulers and governors of the early Islamic state. This makes it difficult to see how historical scenarios that require for their acceptance a total discontinuity in the historical memory of the Muslim community - such as that Muhammad did not exist, the Qur'an was not written in Arabic, Mecca was originally in a different place etc. - can really be justified. Many of these scenarios rely on absence of...}
evidence, but it seems a shame to make such a recourse when there are so many very vocal forms of material evidence still waiting to be studied.\[100\]

Similar conclusions were also reached by Federico Corriente, who said:

Since neither the sources of the history of Early Islam nor trustworthy reports on the socio-linguistic situations of Arabia in those days appear to support Luxenberg's claims, cleverly interwoven as the warp of his hypothesis of the usefulness of an alternative Syro-Aramaic reading of the dark passages of the Qur'an, one wonders about the correctness of the particular solutions offered by him in each case, only to find that a few of them may be accepted as improvements to the traditional interpretations, while some are allowable but unnecessary as sheer interpretative alternatives, and some might be outright rejected because of misapprehensions and misinformation.\[101\]

In this article, we have examined the claims of Mingana and Luxenberg concerning the origins of various aspects of the Arabic script. It was shown that the Arabic script originated from the Nabataean script as opposed to Luxenberg's syro-aramäische script. The diacritical marks in Arabic were already known before the advent of Islam and it is most likely that they came from the Nabataean script. As for the vowel marks in Arabic, Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali was the first one to introduce them. It is highly unlikely that they could have originated from Syriac because the orthographical needs of Syriac were to a great extent different from that of Arabic. Furthermore, the terminology for vocalization in Syriac script is known only from later authors such as Bar Hebraeus and shows the influence of Arabic orthography. Consequently, the seven ahruf of the Qur'an representing the seven vowel signs of Syriac is rather far-fetched. The analysis of isnad bundles show that the tradition of the revelation of the Qur'an in seven ahruf was already known in the first century of hijra and they can in no way represent the Syriac vocalization of Jacob of Edessa.

The Qur'an was palaeographically a frozen document in the first century of hijra as seen in the manuscripts as well as the qira'at in which they were written; MS. Arabe 328a and MS. Or. 2165 being two good examples. Furthermore, examining the geographical characteristics of the inscriptive evidence, shows that the bulk of the pre-Islamic Syriac inscriptions are confined to the Edessa region in modern south Turkey, the language which Luxenberg says the Qur'an was partially written in. It is certainly a long way from the hijaz region and in particular Makkah. The closest to the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions in terms of geography are the Nabataean inscriptions. In fact, much of the socio-historic context of the origins of Islam can be explained by considering the Nabataean milieu. The Nabataean milieu successfully addresses the origins of Arabic script, dotting and pre-Islamic existence classical Arabic. The proximity of the Arabic script with the Nabataean script makes Luxenberg's hypothesis of syro-aramäische reading of the Qur'an unfeasible. A Syro-
Aramaic milieu would find it impossible to account the aspects of the origins of Arabic script, its dotting, origins of classical Arabic and the socio-historic context relating to the rise of Islam.

There exist other valid explanations for the presence of Aramaic words in the Qur'an. The Nabataeans were Arabs who wrote using the Nabataean Aramaic script. The evidence from the Raqush inscription [267 CE], the earliest dated Arabic text, with Aramaic archaisms shows that the Arabs were familiar with Aramaic. Moreover, a stela from Tayma in northern Saudi Arabia inscribed in Aramaic suggesting that Aramaic had been very important in the hijaz as early as the fifth/fourth centuries BC. Thus, it would be surprising if there were not quite a number of Aramaic words in the hijazi dialect of Arabic. However, this does not make Arabic a mixed language.

To support his hypothesis for the alleged Syro-Aramaic reading of the Qur'an, Luxenberg laments the late origins of Islamic literature. He says:

According to Islamic tradition, the Koran dates back to the 7th century, while the first examples of Arabic literature in the full sense of the phrase are found only two centuries later, at the time of the ‘Biography of the Prophet’; that is, of the life of Mohammed as written by Ibn Hisham, who died in 828. We may thus establish that post-Koranic Arabic literature developed by degrees, in the period following the work of al-Khalil bin Ahmad, who died in 786, the founder of Arabic lexicography (kitab al-ayn), and of Sibawwayh, who died in 796, to whom the grammar of classical Arabic is due. Now, if we assume that the composition of the Koran was brought to an end in the year of the Prophet Mohammed’s death, in 632, we find before us an interval of 150 years, during which there is no trace of Arabic literature worthy of note.

It does not occur to him that the Syriac sources he uses to prove the alleged Syro-Aramaic reading of Qur'an are even later than the Islamic sources. As we have seen, he is unfamiliar with the origins of both Arabic and Syriac source material. To give some more examples, the earliest Arabic literature that comes to us is in the form of hadith collections. An example is the Sahifah of Hammam bin Munabbih, [d. 110 AH /719 CE], a Yemenite follower and a disciple of the companion Abu Hurrayarh, [d. 58 AH / 677 CE], from whom Hammam wrote this Sahifah, which comprises 138 hadith and is believed to have been written around the mid-first AH/seventh century. This is available as a printed edition.[102] The hadith collections of Ibn Jurayj [d. 150 AH] and Ma’mar b. Rashad [d. 153 AH], many of them transmitted by ‘Abd al-Razzaq in his Musannaf, are also available in print.[103] Motzki has traced the material in the Musannaf of ‘Abd al-Razzaq to the first century of hijra.[104]

Apart from Luxenberg's lack of understanding regarding the development of Syriac and Arabic orthographies, grammars and lexicographies, his work makes no attempt to anchor his arguments in any believable historical context, as we have already seen
earlier. It is not clear who these Christians of pre-Islamic Makkah were who used the alleged Qur'anic *aramäische-arabische Mischsprache* and how these writings produced the Arabic Qur'an. What kind of time scales were involved in the transformation? What were their religious beliefs and what made them change their(!) religion into Islam?\(^{[105]}\)

To conclude with a *quote* from Walid Saleh, essentially, Luxenberg is arguing that Islam is the result of a philological comedy (or tragedy) of errors. One is reminded here of Emperor Julian's quip against the Christians and the Christians' apt response; paraphrasing it, one could say that the Muslims read their scripture and misunderstood it; had they understood it, they would be Christians.

And Allah knows best!

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**References & Notes**


Gegenüber der bisherigen Annahme eines in Mekka gesprochenen arabischen Dialekts hat die vorliegende Studie ergeben, daß es sich hierbei eher um eine aramäisch-arabische Mischsprache gehandelt haben muß, sofern die arabische Tradition die Koransprache mit der der Qurays, der Bewohner von Mekka identifiziert.... Dies würde die Annahme nahelegen, daß Mekka ursprünglich eine aramäische Ansiedlung war.

Haben die arabischen Philologen und Kommentatoren nach den vorgebrachten Beispielen selbst echte arabisiche Ausdrücke verlesen, so liegt die einzig mögliche Schlußfolgerung im Hinblick auf eine mündliche Koranüberlieferung auf der Hand. Sollte eine solche Überlieferung überhaupt existiert haben, so müßte man annehmen, daß diese ziemlich früh abgebrochen ist. Daß sie jedenfalls erhebliche Lücken aufweist, ist die allermindeste Folgerung, die sich daraus ergibt.

Der Koran hat insoweit seine Sprache nicht für jene Araber bestimmt, die sich rund anderthalb Jahrhunderte danach eine andere arabische Sprache zurechtgelegt haben. Dieser wesentliche Umstand macht es historisch erklärlich, weshalb die späteren Araber dieses Koranarabisch nicht mehr verstanden haben.

Was aber die Kluft noch weiter vertiefte, ist der in der arabischen Koranexegese fehlende Bezug zur Schrift.


Die frühe Form der arabischen Buchstaben wie die Art ihrer Ligaturen legen die Vermutung nahe, daß die syro-aramäische Kursivschrift der arabischen Schrift als Vorbild gedient hat.

By *syro-aramäische*, Luxenberg meant Syriac, see op cit., p. VII.


It would seem, in fact, that there is a fairly even split in the Arabic inventory of letters: eleven of the Arabic letters would be either of Nabataean or Syriac origin, while ten are much more plausibly related to Nabataean and are hard to explain from Syriac, formal or cursive. It may be also noted that none of the Arabic letters is impossible to explain from Nabataean.


[26] Please see B. Moritz, "Arabic Writing", *Encyclopaedia Of Islam* (Old Edition), 1913, E. J. Brill Publishers, Leyden & Luzac & Co. London, p. 384. He claims that the vowels signs in Arabic were borrowed from the Syriac script; S. Morag, *The Vocalization Systems Of Arabic, Hebrew, And Aramaic: Their Phonetic And Phonemic Principles*, 1962, Mouton & Co.: Gravenhage, p. 46. He says that the Syriac vocalization "possibly" influenced Arabic system; C. H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar And Qur'anic Exegesis In Early Islam*, 1993, E. J. Brill: Leiden, New York, Köln, p. 31-32. Versteegh says that the Arabs borrowed both the diacritical dots as well as vowels from Syriac. But he casts doubts on his own statement by saying that their terminology that we know of early Syriac grammarians is derived from reports of later writers such as Bar Hebraeus. It is very well possible that their terminology reflects Arabic influence; S. al-Munajjid, *Dirasat fi Tarikh al-Khatt al-‘Arabi Mundhu Bidayatihi ila Nihayat al-‘Asr al-Umawi* (French Title: *Etudes De Paleographie Arabe*), 1972, Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid: Beirut (Lebanon), p. 128. He has shown some reservations about attributing the origins of skeletal dots to Syriac; Abu ‘Amr ‘Uthman bin Sa‘id al-Dani (ed. Dr. ‘Izzat Hasan), *Al-Muhkam fi Naqt al-Masahif*, 1997 (1418 AH), Dar al-Fikr: Damascus (Syria), pp. 28-29. Dr. ‘Izzat Hasan attributes the vowel marks in Arabic due to Syriac influences.

[27] For Mingana see refs. 5 and 6.

The mendacity of Arabs borrowing numerous dots from the Syriac has been recognized quite early. Please see E. J. Revell, "The Diacritical Dots And The Development Of Arabic Alphabet", Journal Of Semitic Studies, 1975, Volume XX, No. 2, p. 184. Revell says:

Arabic tradition states that the diacritical points were borrowed from the Syrians. This cannot be true of the signs themselves, since the requirements of Arabic were quite different from those in Syriac.

C. Luxenberg, Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache, op cit., p. 19. He says:

Die islamische Tradition ist jedenfalls außerstande, irgendein Datum zur endgültigen Fixierung der Koranlesung durch Einführung der diakritischen Punkte zu nennen, so daß man auf die allgemeine Feststellung angewiesen ist, daß dieser Prozeß sich über etwa drei Jahrhunderte erstreckt hat.

Johannes J. G. Jansen, who reviewed Luxenberg's book (Bibliotheca Orientalis, LX N° 3-4, mei-augustus 2003, Columns 477-480), claims that the earliest occurrence of diacritical dots is in an inscription from 58 AH! We can't expect such poorly informed "scholars" to be a source of "distress" to "many pious Muslims".

B. Gruendler, The Development Of The Arabic Scripts: From The Nabatean Era To The First Islamic Century According To The Dated Texts, op cit., p. 127.

J. F. Healey, "Nabataean To Arabic: Calligraphy And Script Development Among The Pre-Islamic Arabs", Manuscripts Of The Middle East, op cit., p. 45. Healey says that the orderly usage of diacritics may have come from Syriac which we have shown to be false; Also Nabia Abbott had surmised long time ago by studying early Islamic coins and papyrus PERF No. 558 that the diacritical dots originated from pre-Islamic times, N. Abbott, The Rise Of The North Arabic Script And Its Kur'anic Development, With A Full Description Of The Kur'an Manuscripts In The Oriental Institute, op cit., p. 38.
[33] See ref. 5 and 6.

[34] C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, op cit., p. 16 for discussion on borrowing of Arabic vowels from Syriac. He says:

> der Duktus geht von rechts nach links, die Buchstaben bezeichnen im Prinzip die Konsonanten, wobei nur zwei Buchstaben zur Wiedergabe der Halb- bzw. Langvokale \( w/u \) und \( y/i \) als sog. matres lectionis dienen. Später haben die Araber das *Alif* \( \text{ا} \), das im Aramäischen nur in bestimmten Fällen im Auslaut als langes \( a \) dient, als dritte *mater lectionis* generell auch im Kontext eingeführt. Sofern diese Schreibreform auch im Korantext durchgesetzt wurde, konnten Konsequenzen für bestimmte Lesarten nicht ausbleiben. Eine erste Bezeichnung der Kurzvokale \( a, u \) und \( i \) durch Punkte, ebenfalls nach dem Vorbild des früheren syro-aramäischen Vokalisations-systems - wonach die vokalhellere Aussprache \( (a) \) durch einen Punkt über, die vokaldunklere Aussprache \( (e/i) \) durch einen Punkt unter dem Konsonanten angedeutet wird, denen im Arabischen ein mittlerer Punkt zur Bezeichnung des \( u \) hinzugefügt wurde -, soll unter 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (685-705) als erste Lesehilfe eingeführt worden sein.

For the *ahruf* please see full discussion in pp. 23-24. As for the five *ahruf* Luxenberg says:

> Sofern Tabari auch die Variante ... (fünf Buchstaben / Lesezeichen) erwähnt, wäre damit möglicherweise ein entsprechender Hinweis auf die bei den Westsyrern eingeführten fünf griechischen Vokalzeichen gegeben.


> There are two sets of vowels. One is the invention of Jacob, bishop of Edessa, in the seventh century, consists of points placed in various positions; the other is the invention of the famous scholar Theophilus, of Edessa, in the eight century, consisting of the Greek vowels in a reversed direction.

[36] J. B. Segal, *The Diacritical Point And The Accents In Syriac*, 1953, Oxford University Press: London. For naming of vowels in Eastern Syria, please see pp. 33. See pp. 44-47 for discussion on the Greek vowels. Theophilus of Edessa \([d. 785 CE]\) was supposed to have invented the Greek vowels. However, there is difference of opinion among the Syriac grammarians on this issue. Also see S. Morag, *The Vocalization Systems Of Arabic, Hebrew, And Aramaic: Their Phonetic And Phonemic Principles*, op cit., p. 49, footnote 16.
The diagram is taken from these pages and slightly modified by us. This diagram gives an excellent summary of development of vowels in Eastern and Western Syria.


ibid., p. 15.


The *isnad* bundles were drawn using *Hadith Sharif* software by al-Sakhr.


[48] This kind of *isnad-cum-matn* analysis can be found in many of Motzki's publications. See H. Motzki, "The Collection Of The Qur'an: A Reconsideration Of The Western Views In Light Of Recent Methodological Developments", *Der Islam*, 2001, Volume 78, pp. 1-34.

[49] That the common link was the inventor of a *hadith*, was championed by G. H. A. Juynboll. This is simply an *apriori* assumption without any basis. See G. H. A. Juynboll, "Some *Isnād*-Analytical Methods Illustrated On The Basis Of Several Women-Demeaning Sayings From Hadīth Literature", *Al-Qantara*, 1989, Volume 10, pp. 343-384. A critique of such position on common links was made by Harald Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey", *Arabica*, 2005, Volume LII, No. 2, pp. 226-230.


[51] J. B. Segal's, *The Diacritical Point And The Accents In Syriac*, op cit., p. 44.


[57] *ibid.*, p. 7.

[58] C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, op cit., p. II; An image of this manuscript is


[60] ibid., e.g., folio 10a for diacritical points.


... über dem Buchstaben voneinander unterscheiden, was wiederum als Muster für das später eingeführte und weiter entwickelte Punktationssystem der arabischen Schrift gedient haben mag, war die frühe arabische Schrift also eine Art Kurzschrift, die dem Eingeweihten als Gedächtnisstütze dienen mochte. Mehr, so möchte man meinen, brauchte man auch anfangs nicht, da zuverlässige Lektoren (.. quorra) die Verkündigung des Koran unmittelbar vom Propheten vernommen und auswendig gelernt haben sollen.


[70] Since there are no references available depicting the geographical spread of the inscriptions, we decided to go through individual references and plot the data on a map. The references used are:

**The Nabataean inscriptions:**


The Syriac inscriptions:


A a good compilation of the pre-Islamic Syriac inscriptions is done by H. J. W. Drijvers (ed.), *Old Syriac (Edessean) Inscriptions*, 1972, Semitic Studies Series, E. J. Brill: Leiden. It was further expanded by H. J. W. Drijvers & J. F. Healey, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions Of Edessa And Osrhoene*, 1999, Brill: Leiden. Most of the inscriptions mentioned here, as the name suggests, are from Edessa and nearby places.

For more pre-Islamic Syriac inscriptions in Edessa and other areas including the Fertile Crescent, see the following: C. C. Torrey, "The Semitic Inscriptions" in P. V. C. Baur, M. I. Rostovtzeff & A. R. Bellinger (eds.), *The Excavations At Dura-Europos Conducted By Yale University And The French Academy Of Inscriptions And*

There are a few pre-Islamic Syriac inscriptions of unknown provenance or uncertain date that are not included in the map. They are: R. C. Steiner, "A Syriac Church Inscription From 504 CE", *Journal Of Semitic Studies*, 1990, Volume 35, pp. 99-108. This inscription is most likely from Edessa. There are inscriptions in four inscriptions in the National Museum in Damascus, Syria, from 5th and 6th centuries. They were published by A. Abu ‘Assaf, "Kitābāt Suryānī Zadīdah Fi-l-Muthaf al-Watnī bi-Dimashq", *Annales Archeologiques Arabes Syriennes*, 1972, Volume 22, No. 1 and 2, pp. 135-144. There provenance is unknown. An inscription from uncertain date due to lacuna is from Deir Makr and was published by J. Naveh, "Syriac Miscellanea", *`Atiqot*, 1976, Volume 11, pp. 102-104; St. J. Simpson, "A Note On Qasr Serij", *Iraq*, 1994, Volume 56, pp. 149-151. Provenance known but no date available; H. Salame-Sarkis, "Syria Grammata Kai Agalmata", *Syria*, 1989, Volume 66, pp. 313-319. Here the date is early 7th century but the exact provenance is not known. It is most likely from the Antioch region; E. Puech, "Une Inscription Syriaque Sur Mosaique", *Liber Annuss*, 1988, Volume 38, pp. 267-270. Date known but provenance unknown; M. Halloun, "Two Syriac Inscriptions", *Liber Annuss*, 1988, Volume 38, pp. 271-275. Date known but provenance unknown. It is perhaps from Edessa region; F. Briquel-Chatonnet, "Une Inscription Syriaque Sur Mosaique De La Region De L'Euphrate", *Semitica*, 1996, Volume 46, p. 146-153. The inscription is present in Deir al-Zor Museum in Syria. Its date is known but its provenance is not; E. C. Dodd, "The Monastery Of Mar Musa Al-Habashi Near Nebek Syria", *Arte Medievale*, 1992, Volume 6 (II), No. 1, pp. 61-67 for discussion. The Syriac inscriptions in this monastery were discussed by J. C. McCullough, "Appendix I: Syriac Inscriptions", pp. 133-135. Provenance is known but the dating is not known due to small size of fragments of the inscriptions.

For Arabic inscriptions: Click [here](#) for complete listing.

[71] J. B. Chabot, "Sur Une Inscription Syriaque Du Sinai", *Journal Asiatique*, 1906, Volume 10(7), pp. 290-293. These Syriac inscriptions were left by pilgrims from Balad (Iraq) in Sinai peninsula and there is no dating available; E. C. D. Hunter, "Syriac Inscriptions From Al-Hira", *Oriens Christianus*, 1996, Volume 80, pp. 66-81. Erica Hunter mentions an ostracon that was a note by a pilgrim or a monk. All the


[74] We thank Dr. R. Hoyland for pointing this one out.


[76] *ibid.*, p. 44. The picture is taken from here and slightly modified with some additional information.

[77] *ibid*. See the full article. Healey argues against the impossibility of Nabataeans being Aramaeans.


[79] *ibid*.

[80] J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook Of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions: Aramaic Inscriptions Including Inscriptions In The Dialect of Zenjirli* (Volume II), 1975, Oxford At The Clarendon Press, pp. 148-151, no. 30, Plate IX; J. F. Healey, "Were The Nabataeans Arabs?", *Aram*, *op cit.*, p. 43; Also see J. F. Healey & H. Bin Seray, "Aramaic In The Gulf: Towards A Corpus", *Aram*, 1999-2000, Volume 11-12, pp. 1-14 for Aramaic inscriptions in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The Achaemenids used Aramaic as the *lingua franca* of administration and trade not only in the West (Palestine, North Arabia, Egypt, Anatolia) but also in the East (in Iran). It is therefore not in the least surprising to find Aramaic in use during and after the Achaemenid period in those areas of the Gulf which were affected by Persian and Parthian political commercial links.


The *Musnad* inscriptions at Qaryat al-Faw, South Western Saudi Arabia, suggest that the deities Kahl, El, al-Lat, ‘Athar Ashraq, al-‘Uzza, Manat, Wadd, Shams, etc. were worshipped in the State of Kinda, South (western) Arabian peninsula. Some of these are obviously Nabataean deities. What is interesting is that many of these idols also survived until the advent of Islam. If one looks at the complete picture using the Nabataean and the *Musnad* inscriptions in the *Hijaz* and surrounding area, they are not in Christian in content at all. See A. R. Al-Ansary, *Qaryat Al-Fau: A Portrait Of Pre-Islamic Civilisation In Saudi Arabia*, 1982, University of Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), p. 28.


[87] This discussion is taken from J. B. Segal, *The Diacritical Point And The Accents In Syriac*, *op cit.*, p. 41.


[98] *ibid*.

[99] For example, see R. Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 1879, Tomus I, e typographeo Clarendoniano: Oxonii, see the preface on pp. v-vi for details. For Luxenberg's use of these lexicons see *Die syro-aramâische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache, op cit.*, p. 8.


Dated Texts Containing The Qur’an From 1-100 AH / 622-719 CE

1. Introduction

In the last few decades a controversy has arisen over the period in which the text of the Qur’an became codified. The traditional view was that the third caliph, ‘Uthman (r. 23-35 AH / 644-61 CE), charged a group of men at Madinah with collecting and standardizing the text. He commissioned one of the Prophet's former secretaries, Zayd ibn Thabit, and several prominent members of the tribe of Quraysh, ‘Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr, Sa’id b. al-‘As, and ‘Abd al-Rahman b. al-Harith are those most often mentioned, to produce a standard copy of the text, based on the compilation in the keeping of Hafsah, daughter of second caliph ‘Umar. If there was any disagreement over language among members of the commission, it was to be resolved in accordance with the dialect spoken by Quraysh. Once the standard text had been established, several copies were made and sent to major cities in the Islamic state, specifically Damascus, Basra, Kufa, and among others (c. 30 AH / 650 CE).

As for the revisionistic views, many theories have been proposed as to how the Qur’an/Islam came about. According to these various revisionistic schools of thought, Islam was originally a Jewish sect (pace Hagarism); the Qur’an was contemporaneous with the sira (pace Wansbrough); Islam arose in the Negev desert somehow allegedly validating Wansbrough's hypothesis (pace Nevo); the Qur’an came after the sira and hadith (pace Rubin); the Qur’an was an Iraqi product and predates the sira (pace Hawting) and, recently, the Qur’an is a product of Syriac Christianity (pace Luxenberg). It seems that these revisionistic schools often follow methodologies that do not agree with each other (whether in whole or in part) and none of them seem to agree on any one particular scenario, be it historical, social, cultural, political, economic or religious. Something that appears to be more fundamental in their analyses is that the revisionists are willing to formulate any theory to lend verisimilitude to their opinions concerning the Qur’an/Islam, no matter how much it contradicts all of the available well-established evidence, documentary or otherwise.

In this article, we want to present the dated texts containing the Qur’an in the first hundred years of Islam (1-100 AH / 622-719 CE) as seen in the Arabic inscriptions, coins and Qur’anic manuscripts. These dated texts are chosen on the basis of their date and provenance. There exist numerous Qur’anic manuscripts, whether in the
form of fragments or substantial texts, from the first century of *hijra* without any definite provenance. These manuscripts are not included in the presentation below. Based upon the date and provenance, the texts will be geographically mapped to give an idea about the distribution of the Qur’an in the Islamic state. Not included in the corpus below is the *basmalah* (i.e., *bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*) although it is a part of the Qur’anic verse 27:30. It is used from very early times and is employed for many tasks in the daily life of a Muslim.

A few words need to be said about the use of the Qur’an in Islamic tradition. A narrow focus on the Qur’anic text and continued efforts to establish and preserve the ‘Uthmanic standard without deviation have persisted throughout the history of Islam, but side by side with that concern there has been a tradition of drawing upon and modifying that text for a variety of rhetorical purposes. It is a common feature in sermons (*khutbah*) and speeches to juxtapose disparate Qur’anic passages, conflation, shift of person, and occasional omission of brief phrases. Thus it is not surprising to see such a feature in the dated texts containing the Qur’an listed below. Such a creative use of the Qur’an was hardly unique to Islam, and indeed it would be more surprising if no such tradition had developed. In one particular case from a Qur’anic inscription from the 1st century or very early 2nd century AH, located in al-Hanakiyya some 110 km east-northeast of Madinah, Donner has shown that the person writing the inscription put the passage in the first person so that it would apply to himself, resulting in a slight change in wording of part of the verse in question (Qur’an 3:67).\[8\] The tradition was, however, dependent upon recognition of the text by the listeners - a strong indication that the Qur’an was already the common property of the Muslim community in the Islamic state by the end of the 7th century CE.

2. List Of Dated Qur’anic Texts From 1-100 AH / 622-719 CE

An Arabic Inscription From Cyprus, 29 AH / 650 CE.

`Qul ū Allāhu ahad Allāhu al-ṣamad lam yalid wa-lam yulad wa-lam yakun lahu kufīwan ahad` [Complete Qur’an 112]

**Translation:** Say: God the one, God the eternal, He did not beget and was not begotten. And there is none like unto Him.
Inscriptions In The Inner Octagonal Arcade


Translation: Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is Able to do all things.... Verily God and His Angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe, bless him and salute him with a salutation!.... O, People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not 'Three' - Cease! (it is) better for you! - God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to be a servant unto God, nor will the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him".... Peace be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive!.... Such was Jesus, son of Mary, (this is) a
statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It befitteth not (the Majesty of) God that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is".... Lo! God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him. That is the right path".... "God (Himself) is witness that there is no God save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise. Lo! religion with God (is) Islam. Those who (formerly) received the Book differed only after knowledge came unto them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso disbelieveth the revelations of God (will find that) lo! God is swift at reckoning".

**Inscriptions In The Outer Octagonal Arcade**

_Qul hū Allāhu ahad Allāhu al-ṣamad lam yalid wa-lam yulad wa-lam yakun lahu kufūwan aḥad_ [Complete Qur’an 112].... _inna allāha wa māli‘ikatāhu yusallīna ‘ala al-nabīyi yā ayyuhā al-ladhīna āmanū sallū ‘alayhi wa sallimū taslīmā_ [Complete Qur’an 33:56].... _al-ḥamdu lillāhi al-ladhī lam yattakhidh waladān wa lam yakun lahu shari‘un fi al-mulki wa lahu lahu wa liyūn mina al-dhulli wa kabbirhu takbīrā_ [Complete Qur’an 17:111 complete except for the initial _wa quli_, i.e., "and say"].... _lahu al-mulku wa lahu al-ḥamdu yuḥyī wa yumītu wa huwa ‘ala kulli shayin qadīr_ [a conflation of Qur’an 64:1 and 57:2]....

**Translation:** Say: God the one, God the eternal, He did not beget and was not begotten. And there is none like unto Him.... Verily God and His Angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe, bless him and salute him with a salutation!.... Praise be to God, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence".... Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is Able to do all things.

**The Copper Plaque Inscriptions At The Dome Of The Rock In Jerusalem, 72 AH / 692 CE.**

_lam yalid wa-lam yulad wa-lam yakun lahu kufūwan aḥad_ [Part of Qur’an 112:3-4].... _allāhumma mūlika al-mulki tu‘utī al-mulka man tashā‘u wa tanzi‘u al-mulka mimman tashā‘u_ [Part of Qur’an 3:26].... _kataba ‘ala nafsihi al-rahmāt_ [Part of Qur’an 6:12].... _wasi‘at rahmatuhu kulla shayin_ [Part of Qur’an 7:156, with shift from first to third person]
Translation: He begotteth not nor was begotten and there is none comparable unto Him... Owner of Sovereignty! Thou givest sovereignty unto whom Thou wilt, and Thou withdrawest sovereignty from whom Thou wilt... He hath prescribed for Himself mercy...

Northern Inscription

\[
\text{lam yalid wa-lam yulad wa-lam yakun lahu kuf\u011fuwan a\u0147ad [Part of Qur’an 112:3-4]}...
\[
\text{[Mu\u015fammad ras\u011fu\u015f All\u0154h] arsalahu bi-l-huda wa d\u011fin al-\u0161aqq liyudhhiru ‘ala al-dini kullahi wa-law karih-al-mushrik\u015f [Almost complete Qur’an 61:9 with an adjustment at the beginning to introduce Muhammad]... Āmānnā billāhī wa mā unzila ilā Mu\u015fammad wa mā ātiya al-nabīyūna min rabbihim lā nufarriqu bayna āhadin minhum wa nāhnu lahu muslimūn [Part of Qur’an 2:136 or 3:84, with change of person and omission of the central section, where Ibrahim, Isma’il, Ishaq, Ya’qub, the "tribes", Musa, and ‘Isa are mentioned individually].}
\]

Translation: He begotteth not nor was begotten and there is none comparable unto Him... Muhammad is the messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that He might make it prevail over all religions even if the associators are averse... We believe in God and that which was revealed unto Muhammad and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.

Aniconic Silver Coins ("Reformed Coinage"), Minted By The Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, From 77 AH / 696 CE.

Reverse field: Allāhu aḥad Allāhu al-ṣamad lam yalid wa-lam yulad wa-lam yakun lahu kufūwan aḥad

God the one, God the eternal, He did not beget and was not begotten. And there is none like unto Him [Complete Qur’an 114 except for the initial qul hu. However, the "reformed" dīnār also omits the verse wa-lam yakun lahu kufūwan aḥad ("And there is none like unto Him")].

Reverse margin: [Muḥammad rasūl Allāh] arsalahu bi-l-huda wa dīn al-ḥaqq liyudhhiru ‘ala al-dini kullahi wa-law karih-al-mushrikūn [Almost complete Qur’an 61:9 with an adjustment at the beginning to introduce Muhammad]

Muhammad is the messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that He might make it prevail over all religions even if the associators are averse.
A Rock Inscription From Makkah Containing Qur’an 38:26, 80 AH / 699-700 CE.

yā Dāwūdū innā ja‘alnāka khalīfatan fī al-ardi fahākm bayna an-nāsī bil-ḥaqqī wa lā tattabi‘i al-hawa fayudillaka ‘an sabīli allāhī inna al-ladhīna yaddillūna ‘an sabīlillāhi lahum ‘adhābun shadīdun bimā nasū yawma al-ḥisāb [Complete Qur’an 38:26].

Translation: O David, we have indeed made you a vicegerent on earth. So judge between men in justice, and do not follow your desires which will mislead you from the path of God. Verily, for those who stray from the path of God is severe chastisement, for those who have forgotten the Day of Reckoning.

A Rock Inscription From Makkah Dated 84 AH / 703-704 CE.

yā ayyuhā al-nāsu attaqū rabbakumu al-ladhī khalaqakum [Part of Qur’an 4:1]... wa al-ladhīna min qablikum la‘allakum tuflīhūn [Part of Qur’an 2:21 and 2:189].

Translation: Oh mankind, fear your Lord who created you... and those who came before you if you wish to be successful.

A Rock Inscription From Makkah Containing Qur’an 20:130, 84 AH / 703-704 CE.

wa sabbiḥ biḥamdi rabbika qabla tulū‘i al-shamsi wa qabla ghurūbihā wa min ānā‘i al-layli fasabbiḥ wa atrāfā al-nahāri la‘allaka tarda [Almost complete Qur’an 20:130].

Translation: So laud the praises of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and during a portion of the night, and at the thresholds of the day, so that you may be pleased [with God's subsequent reward].

Inscription In A Mosque In Damascus, Built By Caliph Walīd, 86-87 AH / 705-706 CE.


Translation: There is no compulsion in religion, the right way has become distinguished from error, and he who rejects false deities and believes in God has grasped a firm handhold that will never break, God is all-hearing and all-knowing.
**Jabal Usays (Syria) Inscription Containing First Line Of The Throne Verse (Qur’an 2:255), 93 AH / 711 CE.**

Allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa al-ḥayyu al-qayyūmu [Part of Qur’an 2:255, the Throne Verse (Ayat al-Kursi)].

**Translation:** God! None has the right to be worshipped but He, the Ever Living, the One who sustains and protects all that exists.

**A Rock Inscription From Makkah Dated 98 AH / 716-717 CE.**

wa man yatawakkal ‘ala allāhi fa-allāhu [huwa] hasbuhu wa-[inna] allāha bālighu amrīhi wa [ ] qad ja’ala allāhu likulli shay’in qadrān [Almost complete Qur’an 65:3].

**Translation:** Whomsoever places their trust in God, He will suffice them. Verily, God will fulfill His purpose. Indeed, He has set everything in measure.

It quotes part of 65:3 as it is and the rest of the verse is slightly modified without changing the meaning. The words in square brackets indicate the actual word in the Qur’an in place of the word preceding it.

**A Rock Inscription From Makkah Containing Qur’an 56:28-40 Dating From First Century Of Hijra.**

fit sidrin makhdūdin. wa talhīn mandūdin. wa zillīn mamdūdin. wa mā’in maskūbin. wa fākiḥatin kathīrahin. lā maqtū’atin wa lā mānū’ahn. wa furushin marfū’ahn. innā ansha’nāhunna inshā’an. faja’alnāhunna abbārān. ‘urubān atrābān. li’ashābi al-yamīn. mā ashābi al-yamīn. thullatun mina al-awwālīn. wa thullatun mina al-akhirīn. [Complete Qur’an 56:28-40 with an addition of mā ashābi al-yamīn between verses 38 and 39 perhaps to give a fitting conclusion to the inscription]

**Translation:** [They will be] among Lote tree without horns. Among Talh trees with flowers, piled one above another; in shade long-extended; by water flowing constantly and fruit in abundance whose season is not limited nor [supply] forbidden. And on couches raised high, We have created them of special creation. And made them pure [and undefiled], full of love [for their mates], equal in age. For the Companions of the Right Hand. *What will be the Companions of the Right Hand. A [goodly] number from those of old. And a [goodly] number from those of later times.*
Inscription From Ta'if Containing Qur’anic Verse 33:56.

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inna \text{ allāha wa malā’ikatahu yusallūna ‘ala al-nabīyi yā ayyuhā al-ladhīna āmanū sallū ‘alayhi wa sallimū taslīmā [Complete Qur’an 33:56].}
\]

Translation: Verily God and His Angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe, bless him and salute him with a salutation!

The "Great Umayyad Qur’an" From The Time Of Caliph Al-Walid and many early hijazi manuscripts.

This monumental Qur’anic manuscript, perhaps one of the most well-studied and is dated it to the last decade of the 1st century of hijra, around 710-715 CE, in the reign of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid. It was found in San'a' (Yemen). Its origin appears may have been from Syria.

3. Codification Of The Qur’an - Early Or Late?

Recently Christoph Luxenberg had attempted to show that the Qur’an was drafted in a mixed Aramaic-Arabic tongue and based upon Christian Aramaic texts, contrary to the traditional view of its composition in Arabic and derived from Arabian religious traditions. His hypothesis would place the genesis of the Arabic Qur’an some 150 years after the advent of Islam. To lend verisimilitude to his hypothesis, Luxenberg requires the burden of proof, and in order to assemble such ‘evidence’, Luxenberg finds himself forced to rubbish certain indisputable historical facts in the process of creating new ones. Take for example the Dome of the Rock which some western scholars view as an important milestone in relation to the early codification of the Qur’an. According to Luxenberg, it is a Christian Church built as a memorial to Jesus containing Christian inscriptions which record, amongst other things, the theological disputes between the camps of the Hellenised and Syrian Christians regarding the divinity of Jesus. The phrase \( \text{muhammadun ‘abdullāhi wa rasūluhū} \) does not mean ‘Muhammad is the slave of God and his Messenger’, rather it means ‘Praised be the slave of God and His messenger’ which Luxenberg considers as a plain unambiguous reference to Jesus.\(^9\) Contradicting the claims of Luxenberg, numerous 1st century AH Arabic-Greek bilingual papyri from the time of Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan\(^10\) (65-86 AH / 685-705 CE) as well as later ones such as Egyptian National Library Inv. No. 67 (90-91 AH / 709-710 CE), PER Inv. Ar. Pap. 3976 (98-99 AH / 716-717 CE) among others\(^11\) clearly translate the Arabic phrase \( \text{muḥammad rasūl Allāh} \) in Greek as ‘\( \text{maamet apostolos theou} \)’ i.e., ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of...
God’, thus confirming that ‘Muhammad’ was considered as a proper name and not "praised" or "praiseworthy". Even more damaging, however, is the failure of Luxenberg to anchor his hypotheses in any believable historical context. If we direct our focus on three Christian Syriac apocalyptic texts originating in the milieu of northern Mesopotamia, contemporaneous with the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock (i.e., composed in or shortly after 691/92 CE), the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse* and the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, one will observe the common usage of strong religious overtones in relation to the importance of Jerusalem hitherto unparalleled in earlier Christian Syriac texts, thus showing an awareness of recent historical developments in the city, the construction of the Dome of the Rock along with its “anti-Christian” Arabic inscriptions, built in the very same city as the holiest Christian sanctuary, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Reinink aptly observes,

Though there are textual and literary differences between these works, they agree in one most important aspect: the Arab rule is to be destroyed fairly soon by the highly idealized figure of the Christian emperor of Byzantium who, in a *<<holy war>>* against the Muslim enemies of Christianity, will restore Christian authority over Jerusalem and establish a universal *pax Christiana*, which will last until the end of times.[12]

Luxenberg’s ideas have also generated potential clones that claim the alleged Syro-Aramaic (= Syriac) reading of the Qur’an. One such work is by George Sawma called *The Qur’an Misinterpreted, Mistranslated, And Misread: The Aramaic Language of the Qur’an*[13] - a hastily edited book with a raft of spelling mistakes as well as numerous factually incorrect statements. To justify his claims of the "Aramaic language of the Qur’an", Sawma says that the Arabic alphabet "developed out of a form of the Aramaic alphabet"[14] and that the compilation of the Qur’an mentioned in *Sahih* of al-Bukhari dates "more than 200 years after the death of Muhammad".[15] According to him, with such a late source for the collection of the Qur’an, it is highly likely that there is "little trace" of the actual events that happened.[16] Furthermore, Sawma claims that between the period of death of the Prophet in 632 CE to the beginning of Marwanid rule in 690 CE there are no "written documentations covering the rise of Islam".[17] Simply put, Sawma considers the entire Qur’anic text to have been composed in Syro-Aramaic;[18] the Arabs difficulty in understanding the Qur’an being a direct result of their mistaken belief that it was composed in Arabic! [19] In order to further bolster his case, he uses the works of Crone, Cook, Wansbrough and Luxenberg to affirm the late compilation of the Qur’an.[20]
In order to check these claims, let us now plot the geographical distribution of the texts containing the Qur’an from the 1st century using the corpus of dated texts containing the Qur’an [Figure 1(a)]. It is seen that the geographical distribution of the early Qur’anic texts range from Cyprus in the north to San‘a’ in the south. This means that the Muslims of 1st century of hijra were already aware of the existence of the Qur’an in a broad geographical expanse of the Islamic state. Furthermore, they were using various Qur’anic verses in their writings, whether to express the message of Islam or to remember God. This suggests that the codification of the Qur’an was already completed in the 1st century of hijra. Such a conclusion was reached by Estelle Whelan using the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock as well as Islamic literary sources.\footnote{21}
A further confirmation of early codification also comes from a recent work of Harald Motzki who had discussed the Western views on the collection of the Qur’an by dealing with the works of Wansbrough (Qur’anic Studies: Sources & Methods Of Scriptural Interpretation, 1977, Oxford University Press), Watt (Muhammad's Mecca, 1988, Edinburgh), Nöldeke and Schwally (Geschichte des Qorans, 1938, Leipzig), Casanova (Mohammad et la fin du Monde, 1911, Paris), Mingana ("The Transmission
We are unable to prove that the accounts on the history of Qur’an go back to the eye-witnesses of the events which were alleged to have occurred. We cannot be sure that the things really happened as is reported in the traditions. However, Muslims account are much earlier and thus much nearer to the time of the events than hitherto assumed in Western scholarship. Admittedly, these accounts contain some details which seem to be implausible or, to put it more cautiously, await explanation, but the Western views which claim to replace them by more plausible and historically more reliable accounts are obviously far away from what they make themselves out to be.\[23\]

If Luxenberg and Sawma were indeed correct in their assessment concerning the origins of the Qur’anic text, one would expect some form of evidence of the Qur’an in Syro-Aramaic language. On the contrary, the dated texts that we have from the first century of hijra are in Arabic as opposed to Syro-Aramaic. Unfortunately for them, they agree with the Qur’anic text that we have today. More importantly, this makes ‘Uthman’s codification of the Qur’an (c. 30 AH / 650 CE) and the first dated Qur’anic text as seen on the tombstone inscription in Cyprus (29 AH / 650 CE) nearly contemporaneous. Furthermore, if we consider folios of the early hijazi manuscripts which are tentatively dated to first half of the first century of hijra, then the time period between ‘Uthman’s codification of the Qur’an and the appearance of one of the earliest manuscript of the Qur’an is at most 20 years. Such a brief time for shifting the language of the Qur’an from Syro-Aramaic to Arabic now becomes a highly untenable proposition. Moreover, the proposition that the Qur’an was originally written in Syro-Aramaic is also highly unlikely as the geographic location of Aramaic language and Aramaeans (Syriac speaking people) does not even overlap with area where the Qur’an first appeared - Makkah and Madinah - the Arabic speaking areas of the hijaz [Figure 1(b)]. Looking closely, the Arabic Qur’an is also to be found in those areas where Syriac was a spoken language. Both the theses of Luxenberg as well as Sawma are bereft of any study dealing with existing early documents such as manuscripts, inscriptions, coins and papyri; the result of which has lead them to propose extravagant ideas concerning the origins of the Qur’an.
4. Conclusions

Although the Western scholars are aware of the corpus of dated Qur’anic texts from the 1st century of hijra, they seem to have not attracted sufficient attention. The sole exception are the Arabic inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock which have been the subject of intense study for about 80 years. In this article, we have discussed the corpus of dated texts of the Qur’an with a definite provenance with the intention of studying their geographical distribution. It was seen that the dated Qur’anic texts from the 1st century of hijra show a very wide geographical distribution - from Cyprus in the north to San'a' in the south and that the earliest dated Qur’anic text is nearly contemporaneous with ‘Uthman's codification of the Qur'an. The presence of Arabic text in the dated Qur’anic texts from 1st century of hijra and their wide geographical distribution also poses problems for the claim that the Qur’an was originally a Syro-Aramaic text. Contrary to the claim of the late compilation of the Qur’an by some of the Western scholars, a wide geographical distribution of the Qur’anic text suggests that the Qur’an was already codified, became a public property resulting in a tradition of drawing upon and modifying that text for a variety of rhetorical purposes.

And Allah knows best!

References


Zu loben ist (gelobt sei) der Knecht Gottes und sein Gesandter.

Unsurprisingly, of the thirty-two references cited in Luxenberg's article, not a single reference deals with the dated documentary texts, found in relative abundance before, during and after the construction of the Dome of the Rock. This questionable methodological approach likewise penetrates the author's endeavour at a “historical reconstruction”; no attempt has been made to provide a critical analysis of the early Christian reactions to the building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.


of hijra translates the Arabic phrase muḥammad rasūl Allāh in Greek as ‘maamet apostolos theos’.


[16] ibid.

[17] ibid., p. 82.


Van Berchem as well as Clermont-Ganneau concluded there may have been an inscription on the Dome of the Rock dated 65 AH, roughly coinciding with the initial construction efforts, now since lost. This was based on the account of Morone da Maleo, a 17th century Franciscan monk. Sharon however dismisses this account as a concoction courtesy of the “assiduous efforts of a 17th century Jerusalem guide.” See M. Sharon, “An Inscription From The Year 65 AH In The Dome Of The Rock: A Study Of A European Report” in S. Shaked, J. L. Blau, S. Pines & M. J. Kister (Eds.), Studia Orientalia: Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata, 1979, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University: Jerusalem, pp. 245-253.

Examples Of The Qur'anic Manuscripts

THE ‘UTHMANIC MANUSCRIPTS

No discussion about the Qur'anic manuscripts begins without the mention of the ‘Uthmanic manuscripts of the Qur'an. Narrations differ as to how many copies were directly ordered and sent out by the Caliph ‘Uthman, but they range from four to seven. It seems certain from various Muslim historical sources that several were lost, through fire amongst other things. There are some copies that are attributed to ‘Uthman. However, it is to be added that there is a disagreement between the scholars whether they are truly ‘Uthmanic. Some Western scholars have rejected the Qur'anic manuscripts attributed to ‘Uthman as "pious forgeries" without showing any scientific evidence (i.e., study of the parchment, script, ink etc.). This itself is unscientific to an extreme. We will discuss some important manuscripts attributed to ‘Uthman below.

The Tashkent Manuscript.

A folio from a Qur'anic manuscript in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, commonly attributed to caliph ‘Uthman, has recently been subject to radiocarbon tests at Oxford, United Kingdom. Although the dates generated by this radiometric technique at either confidence level do not rule out the possibility that this manuscript was produced in ‘Uthman's time, palaeographic studies suggest an 8th century (2nd century hijra) date.
The Al-Hussein Mosque Manuscript.

The Qur'anic manuscript at the al-Hussein mosque in Cairo, written in large Arabic script, is perhaps the oldest of all the manuscripts, and is either `Uthmanic or an exact copy from the original with similarity to the Madinan script.

Mohamed Seif el-Shazli has renovated a lot of manuscripts and monuments in his time. He helped reconstruct temples in Abu Simbel and Nubia, the Zoser Pyramid in Saqqara and spent 10 years in the holy city of Mecca restoring old documents and books. But nothing has come close to the importance of his latest project: the restoration of the first Qur'an ever written.

El-Shazli, along with his son Ahmed, has spent the past year diligently rebuilding the leather pages of the 1,400-year-old book. The holy book - which stands a staggering 50 centimeters high - has been kept in the relics room of al-Hussein Mosque for the past 100 years, along with other relics, including hairs from the Prophet's beard, his sword, parts of his walking stick and clothing. "This may not be the most difficult project that I have done, but it is a project that feeds my soul," says el-Shazli, 58, whose grandfather, Shazli Mahmoud `Ali, worked during the 1920s with British and American archeologists restoring artifacts found at Giza and Saqqara pyramids.

El-Shazli learned the craft of restoration from his father, el-Shazli Mahmoud. He began his apprenticeship when he was 12 years old, assisting his father in restoring leather, moldings, weaving, and wood, as well as manuscripts and books. But it wasn't until he was in his twenties that felt he could work on restoration projects alone.

El-Shazli, a faculty member in the archeology department at Cairo University, was a natural selection when the Egyptian government was looking for someone to restore the Qur'an. In addition to his experience in the field, like the ardent scribes of early Islam, he has memorized the entire Qur'an.

The restoration project is the brainchild of Dr. Souad Maher, the former dean of Cairo University archeology department, who is renowned for being the first female to attain a doctorate in Islamic history in the Arab world. She has long been involved in the renovations of the relics in the mosque and during the 1960s she verified the authenticity of the relics, using the scientific carbon-testing method to determine that the relics and the Qur'an dated back to the time of the Prophet Mohammed(P).

Maher restored the same Qur'an 45 years ago, but she says that the wear and tear of the years made additional restoration work necessary. She petitioned the Ministry of Awqaf to allocate money for the renovation. "The problem is that many people come to see the
book, to touch and kiss it," says Maher. "This is a very important project. After all, this is the first Qur'an in the world. The inscriptions are perfect."

The `Uthman Qur'an, as it is known, is one of four Qur'ans hand-written by the third Caliph `Uthman. According to Sheikh Ahmed Ismail, head Sheikh at al-Hussein Mosque, this is the Qur'an that all other Qur'ans are based on. The Prophet Mohammed'(P) disciples used to write down his recitations on leaves, animal skins and rocks and kept the writings in the home of Hafsa, one of the Prophet's widows. `Uthman, the son-in-law of the Prophet collected the Prophet's writings after his death and put them into one book, creating the version now accepted by Muslims. `Uthman made four copies to be distributed in the Arab world. One was sent to the ruler of Egypt; the other three are believed to be in Iraq, Yemen and Syria.

`Uthman was eventually assassinated by a group of Muslims, who became disgruntled with his ruling abilities and his perceived nepotism. It is said that he was slain while reading the Qur'an, his blood flowing on to the pages. His death ushered in an era of civil wars and political schisms in Islamic history. However he is most remembered as the Caliph who pushed for the preservation of the Qur'an as one book.

Since that time, the holy book has been in the possession of each successive Egyptian ruler. About 500 years ago, the `Uthman Qur'an was moved from the ruler's home to a place called "relics of the Prophet" in old Cairo, then to `Amr Ibn al-As Mosque in Old Cairo, then to the Salah Tala'i Mosque also in old Cairo and finally to al-Hussein Mosque where it has been ever since.

"It was very prestigious and an honor as well for the ruler to have the original Qur'an and relics of the Prophet in his country," says Sheikh Ahmed. "Every ruler was proud to have such relics, as a way to show love and respect."

The years however, haven't been kind to the book. Although it was carefully enclosed in a leather box and a glass case, dust had accumulated between the 1,400 pages and tiny insects had eaten away some portions of the leather pages.

El-Shazli spent the first two months cleaning the pages of the Qur'an and sanitizing the book to kill all the insects, before beginning the restoration work. Two kilos of dust had accumulated in the box where the Qur'an was kept.

Each page takes roughly two weeks to restore. El-Shazli first stretches the old deerskin page between pieces of glass for a week, then fills in any gaps with chemical-free paper. He hand-paints any holes in the letters, however he refuses to replace any completely-
missing letters or words, saying that he doesn't want to alter the text of the Qur'an in any way. "That is the line I don't want to cross when restoring a manuscript," he says.

In the sacred room, el-Shazli works slowly and methodically. Wearing glasses similar to a jeweler's, he studies a portion of the leather page which he has mounted on white paper. As his son Ahmed looks on, he paints in portions where the letters have worn away. After a year and a half of this work, he says the restoration is nearly 80 percent complete. By the summer he says, the Qur'an should be completely restored. After that, el-Shazli hopes the book will be put on display, for any interested scholar or tourist to view. "It is part of our heritage," he says. "It is important that people who want to see it, are able to see the first book in Islam."

The book holds a special significance, especially for those who pray daily in al-Hussein Mosque, considered the most important mosque in Egypt. As Sheikh Ahmed puts it: "This Qur'an was touched by those people who knew the Prophet, who had shaken hands with him. To have this Qur'an in this place, we become spiritually very happy and elated." But Sheikh Ahmed is quick to point out that physical age of the book is secondary to the message inside. "This isn't just a book to be blessed by, it is a way of life," Sheikh Ahmed says. "The Qur'an tells us not only how to pray, but how to work, cultivate and beautify life."

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**FIRST CENTURY HIJRA**

There exist at least four Qur'anic manuscripts that are dated to first half of the first century of hijra (i.e., before 50 AH / 670 CE). These are not the ‘Uthmanic Qur'ans and are parchments written in the hijazi script.

**Surah al-‘Imran. Verses number : End Of Verse 45 To 54 And Part Of 55.**

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a' (Yemen).

**A Qur'anic Manuscript From 1st Century Hijra: Part Of Surah al-Sajda And Surah al-Ahzab.**

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a' (Yemen). This manuscript from San‘a' is dated to first half of the first century of hijra by Hans-Casper Graf von Bothmer.

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a’ (Yemen).


Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a’ (Yemen).

Surah al-Nahl. Verses number: End Of Verse 73 To 88 And Part Of 89.

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a’ (Yemen).

The "Great Umayyad Qur'an" From The Time Of Caliph Al-Walid.

This monumental Qur'anic manuscript, perhaps one of the most well-studied and is dated it to the last decade of the 1st century of hijra, around 710 - 715 CE, in the reign of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid. Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a’ (Yemen).

Vat. Ar. 1605: A Qur'anic Manuscript From 1st Century Hijra In Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

A manuscript from from the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana [Vatican Library] written in hijazi script. This manuscript, the one folio in The Nasser David Khalili Collection (Accession No. KFQ 60, published by Déroche) and a few folios in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Arabe 328a) are parts of the same mushaf. They all are dated to first century of hijra.

MS. Or. 2165: A Qur'anic Manuscript From The 1st Century Hijra In The British Library.

Hailed as by the earlier keepers of it as "probably the earliest Qur'an ever brought to Europe", the British Library says that it is the "oldest Qur'an manuscript" in their possession. This manuscript is written in the hijazi (or ma'il) script. It is usually dated around the mid-second century of hijra. However, a recent study by Yasin Dutton has shown that this manuscript is remarkably similar to the first century Qur'anic manuscript MS. Arabe 328a in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and was written in the qira'at of Ibn ‘Amir (just like MS. Arabe 328a) [Y. Dutton, "Some Notes On The British Library's 'Oldest Qur'an Manuscript' (Or. 2165)", Journal Of Qur'anic Studies, 2004, Volume VI (No. 1), pp. 43-71]. Based on the similarity between MS. Arabe
328a and MS. Or. 2165, he suggests redating this manuscript to the time just before the Umayyad Caliph Walid (r. 86-96 AH), i.e., within the period 30-85 AH with the latter end of this time scale being safer.

**A Perg. 2: A Qur'anic Manuscript From 1st Century Hijra.**

A manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna, written in the *hijazi* script.

**A Qur'anic Manuscript From 1st Century Hijra: Surah al-Ma'idah. Verses 7 Through 12.**

A manuscript from the **Beit al-Qur'an, Manama, Bahrain**, written in the Kufic script.

**P. Michaélidès No. 32 - A Qur'anic Manuscript From First Century Hijra.**

Manuscript from the Collection George Michaélidès, Cairo (Egypt) written in the Kufic(?) script.

**A Ma‘il Manuscript in Kuwait - A Qur'anic Manuscript From First Century Hijra.**

Manuscript from the Tariq Rajab Museum, Kuwait. Written in the *ma‘il* script.

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**SECOND CENTURY HIJRA**

**Surah al-Tawba, Surah Yunus: Part Of 129 From Surah Al-Tawba To Part Of 4 From Surah Yunus.**

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a' (Yemen).

**A Perg. 203: A Qur'anic Manuscript From The Beginning Of 2nd Century Hijra In The Austrian National Library.**

Manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Written in the Kufic script.

**A Perg. 201: A Qur'anic Manuscript From The Beginning Of 2nd Century Hijra In The Austrian National Library.**

Manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Written in the Kufic script.
A Perg. 213: A Qur'anic Manuscript From The Beginning Of 2nd Century Hijra.

Manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Written in the Makkan script.

A Perg. 186: A Qur'anic Manuscript From Middle Of 2nd Century Hijra In The Austrian National Library.

Manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Written in the Kufic script.


Manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Written in the Makkan script.


Manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Written in the Makkan script.

A Perg. 27: A Qur'anic Manuscript From The End Of 2nd Century Hijra In The Austrian National Museum.

Manuscript from the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Written in the Mashq script.

E 20: A Qur'anic Manuscript From 2nd Century Hijra From The Institute Of Oriental Studies, St. Petersburg, Russia.

A manuscript from The Institute Of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia, written in the hijazi script.

One Of The Earliest Dated Qur'anic Manuscript (107 AH / 725 CE) At Egyptian National Library.

An example of one of the earliest dated Qur'anic manuscripts at the Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya (Egyptian National Library), Cairo (Egypt).

An Early Qur'anic Manuscript In Tashkent, Uzbekistan, From 2nd Century Hijra.

This famous manuscript also known as the Samarqand manuscript, housed in Tashkent, is commonly attributed to Caliph ‘Uthman. A folio from a Qur'anic manuscript in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, has recently been subject to radiocarbon tests at
Oxford, United Kingdom. Although the dates generated by this radiometric technique at either confidence level do not rule out the possibility that this manuscript was produced in ‘Uthman's time, palaeographic studies suggest an 8th century (2nd century *hijra*) date.

**A Kufic Manuscript in the King Faisal Centre For Research and Islamic Studies - A Qur'anic Manuscript From 2nd Century Hijra.**

A Manuscript from the King Faisal Centre For Research and Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia, written in Kufic script [External Link].

**SECOND / THIRD CENTURY HIJRA**

**Surah Al-Ma'idah, Surah al-An'am. Part Of 117 (Surah Al-Ma'idah) To Part Of 1 Of Surah Al-An'am.**

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a' (Yemen).

**Surah Al-Nas. Part Of 3 To The End Of The Surah.**

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a' (Yemen).

**Surah Al-Baqarah. Part Of 80 To Part Of 81.**

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a' (Yemen).

**Surah Al-Mursalat. 5 To 26 And Part Of 27.**

Located at Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir, San‘a' (Yemen).
SOME UNIQUE MANUSCRIPTS

The Famous "Blue" Qur'an.

EXTERNAL LINKS TO THE QUR'ANIC MANUSCRIPTS

Professor Brannon Wheeler's Qur'an Manuscripts Page

It contains a healthy collection of Qur'anic manuscripts dated from 1st century of hijra onwards till 14th century of hijra in various scripts such as Ma'il, Kufic, Thuluth, Bihari, Diwani, Andalusi, Maghribi and Nastaliq.

The Schøyen Collection, National Library Of Norway

It has some good collection of Qur'anic manuscripts dating from as early as 2nd century of hijra.

3. The Qira'at In The Qur'anic Manuscripts

Early Qur'anic manuscripts, unlike the modern printed editions, rarely contain information of the Qira'at in which they were written. Deciphering the Qira'at in the Qur'anic manuscripts is a recent endeavour and a very tedious task. Scholars like Nabia Abbott had only mentioned about Qira'at in the manuscripts in a very cursory way. Recently, in-depth studies have been undertaken to decipher the Qira'at in the Qur'anic manuscripts by Dr. Yasin Dutton of University of Edinburgh. He has been looking into various Qur'anic manuscripts to understand the purpose of using various coloured dots in the writing of the Qur'an and studying the consonantal structure (where dotting is nearly absent as in early Qur'ans written in hijazi or ma'il script) to find out the Qira'at in which the Qur'an manuscript was written. Here are a few examples of the manuscripts in which the Qira'at has been identified.

The Qira'at Identified In The Qur'anic Manuscripts

We will also mention Dr. Dutton's publications and provide a brief overview. This section is primarily for those who have access to journals in their libraries.

This study is based on 1st century Qur'anic manuscript "Arabe 328a" in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, written in hijazi (or ma'il) script. This manuscript has enough material to be able to ascertain the reading it represents. This manuscript is almost devoid of dotting and hence the consonantal structure is used to determine the Qira'at and it was found to be that of Ibn 'Amir (d. 118 / 736) - one of the reading later to be declared indisputably mutawatir by Ibn Mujahid (d. 324 / 926). This study is first of its kind on early Qur'anic manuscripts.


The study by Dr. Dutton has shown that this manuscript is remarkably similar to first century manuscript MS. Arabe 328a in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and was written in the Qira'at of Ibn ‘Amir. Based on the similarity between MS. Arabe 328a and MS. Or. 2165, he suggests redating this manuscript to the time just before Umayyad Caliph Walid (r. 86-96 AH), i.e., within the period 30-85 AH with the latter end of this time scale being the safer.


This two-part detailed study is done on the Qur'anic manuscripts from Bodleian Library (Oxford) that date from 3rd / 4th century of hijra. The broad conclusions of this study are:

i. Variants, including shadhdh variants, are not only marked, but in a sense, highlighted by the use of different coloured dots.

ii. The presence of shadhdh variants alongside Seven, Ten or Fourteen Qira'a suggests that the shadhdh variants were treated as seriously as the main readings by those responsible for vocalization.

iii. The vocalized manuscript enables us to have some idea of the reading, or readings, represented. Where there are only single or limited folios available this is not usually possible, but where there is either a distinctive feature, or enough of a
sufficiently well-vocalized manuscript, it is often possible to fix the reading with some precision.

4. The Qur'anic Manuscripts In Museums, Institutes, Libraries & Collections

Maktabat al-Jami‘ al-Kabir (Maktabat al-Awqaf), The Great Mosque, San‘a’, Yemen

The Great Mosque of San‘a’, established in 6th year of hijra when the Prophet entrusted one of his companions to build a mosque. It is considered to be the first mosque in Yemen and among the oldest in Islamic world. The mosque was extended and enlarged by Islamic rulers from time to time. The manuscript collection (ca. 7,000) of the Great Mosque is housed in three libraries in the mosque complex. The first to be established was Al-Maktaba al-Sharqiya which was completed during the reign of al-Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din (1904-1948). The second to be established was Al-Maktaba al-Gharbiya which houses the manuscripts and books of Al-Hay'a al-‘Âmma li-l-Âthar wa Dur al-Kutub. Both these libraries are located in the southern side of the mosque. The Maktabat al-Awqaf, the main modern library, is housed on the second floor in the new three-story building of the Great Mosque of San‘a’. It contains some of the rarest Islamic manuscripts in the world, including rare manuscripts of the Qur'an. Subjects include theology, jurisprudence, Qur'anic sciences, tafsir, terminology of hadith, sirah, sciences of the Arabic language, lexicography, literature, poetry, history, politics, philosophy, logic, astronomy, mathematics, medicine and agriculture. Among the manuscripts in the collection is a copy of the Qur'an reputed to be in the handwriting of Al-Imam ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Zayd Ibn Thabit and Salman al-Farsi, in two parts, each of 150 pages, in large unpointed Kufic script.

In 1385 H/1965 CE heavy rains fell on San‘a’. The Great Mosque was affected and the ceiling in the northwest corner was damaged. During the survey, the workers discovered a large vault full of parchment and paper manuscripts of both the Qur'an and non-Qur'anic material. The dig at the Great Mosque in San‘a', Yemen, had found a large number of manuscripts of the Qur'an dating from first century of hijra.

The UNESCO, an arm of the United Nations, had compiled a CD containing some of the dated San‘a’ manuscripts as a part of "Memory of the World" programme. In this CD there are more than 40 Qur'anic manuscripts which are dated from 1st century of
hijra (in both Hijazi and Kufic scripts), one of them belonging to early 1st century. More than 45 manuscripts have been dated from the period 1st / 2nd century of hijra. A few examples of the manuscripts from 1st, 1st/2nd, 2nd and 2nd/3rd centuries of hijra can be seen at this website.

A few more examples of the 1st and 1st / 2nd century Qur'anic manuscripts from San‘a’ can be found in the book Masahif San‘a’. This book is a catalogue of an exhibition at the Kuwait National Museum, with articles by Hussa Sabah Salim al-Sabah, G. R. Puin, M. Jenkins, U. Dreibholz in both Arabic and English. World Survey Of Islamic Manuscripts covers the catalogue of manuscripts at the Great Mosque published in various books.


Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya (Egyptian National Library), Cairo, Egypt.

The manuscript collection in Dar al-Kutub is regarded as one of the largest and most important in the world. The total number of manuscripts in this library are 50,755 out of which 47,065 are in Arabic, 996 in Persian and 2,150 in Turkish. It contains priceless and rare manuscripts from the Islamic heritage, especially from the first four centuries of hijra, as well as extremely rare illustrated manuscripts unmatched anywhere else in the world. There is a high proportion of manuscripts copied in the early centuries of Islam. It holds two of the earliest dated Qur'anic manuscripts dating from dating 102 AH / 720 CE and 107 AH / 725 CE.

Dar al-Kutub has 50,755 manuscripts from which 47,065 are in Arabic, 996 in Persian and 2150 in Turkish. The manuscripts cover nearly all subjects. A complete reference of catalogue of the manuscripts can be seen in:


Library, No. 16, Cairo, See Pl. 31-34 and Pl. 1-12 for 102 AH / 720 CE and 107 AH / 725 CE, respectively.


**Âstan-i Quds-i Razavi Library**, Mashhad, Iran.

This library has one of the oldest (established in 861 AH/1457 CE) collection of Islamic manuscripts in the Muslim world and the most important in Iran. It has about 29,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Of the 29,000 manuscripts it possess, 11,000 are manuscripts of the Qur'an, thus making it the largest Qur'anic manuscript collection in the world. It is also important in that it contains a large number of magnificent, old and illuminated Qur'anic manuscripts, including several old Kufic Qur'anic manuscripts written on deer skin, other with marvellous illuminations from 3rd century *hijra* (9th century CE) onwards, and some written by famous calligraphers. The manuscripts are catalogued in various publication as can be seen in the reference below.


**Islamic Museum**, Jerusalem, Palestine.

This museum was established in 1923 by the Islamic Legal Council in Palestine. The manuscript collection of the **Islamic Museum** consists entirely of *masahif* of the Qur'an, numbering 644, donated over centuries to Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. Some were presented by rulers and private individuals, and others have been donated by such Palestinian cities as Hebron and Nablus.

The Qur'anic manuscripts vary in type, age and size. Many are rab'at (i.e., they were copied in thirty fascicles and stored in a chest, or rab'a). The oldest is Kufic, from the end of the second century after *hijra*, while the most recent is a copy from the thirteenth century after *hijra*. Sizes range from 16 x 11.5 cm. to the massive second volume of the Qur'an of the Mamluk Sultân Qa'it Bay (r. 872-901/1468-1496), which measures 110 x 90 cm. and is 15 cm. thick. The majority of the Qur'anic manuscripts
are splendidly illuminated and decorated, the exceptions being for the most part the copies of the late Ottoman period.

One of the most important manuscripts in this collection is the Kufic copy of the second half of the Qur'an, the transcription of which is attributed to Al-Hasan b. Al-Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib. The pages in this manuscript are beautifully illuminated, with each surah heading bearing its own distinct style of decoration; the covers are also decorated on both sides, but are of the Mamluk period.

The museum also holds an important collection of 883 documents (855 Arabic; 28 Persian) from the 8th/14th century. The complete reference of the catalogue of the manuscripts in this museum can be seen in:


**Beit al-Qur'an,** Manama, Bahrain.

The **Beit al-Qur'an** collection of Qur'anic manuscripts is one of the most comprehensive of its type in the world. This great collection includes magnificent calligraphic works from as early as the first century *hijra* (7th / 8th CE) to the present day, from all regions of the Islamic world, from China to Andalusian Spain. Manuscripts from 1st and 1st/2nd century of *hijra* are available at this website. It is a privately-owned collection. More information about Beit al-Qur'an and other museums in Bahrain is also available.

**The Nasser David Khalili Collection Of Islamic Art,** London, United Kingdom.

The **Nasser David Khalili Collection Of Islamic Art** contains the largest and most comprehensive range of Qur'anic material in private hands. It is managed by the **Nour Foundation**. The entire history of Qur'an production from the seventh to the twentieth century is covered, and includes items from centers as far apart as India and Spain. A team of distinguished academics is cataloguing the entire collection, which is to encompass a series of twenty-six volumes. The Qur'anic manuscripts in this collection are described and illustrated in four lavish volumes. They are written in various scripts and are dated from late 1st century of *hijra* onwards. The **Nour Foundation** in
collaboration with Oxford University Press has published the collection. The references are:


The second of four volumes cataloguing the Qur'ans, this book includes a Qur'an that retains its original illumination by the greatest calligrapher of the Middle Ages, Yaqut al-Musta'simi. Other masterpieces include a Qur'an written in gold from twelfth-century Iraq; the only twelfth-century Qur'an from Valencia; and a manuscript that is possibly the earliest Qur'an to survive from India.


The third of four volumes cataloguing the Qur'ans in the Khalili Collection, this book includes fifteenth century Qur'ans in Iran, Egypt, Syria, Constantinople, and India as well as sixteenth century Qur'ans in Iran and India.


This two-part volume is the last of four dedicated to the Qur'ans in the Khalili Collection, and covers the period 1700-1900 and items from Islamic Africa, Ottoman Turkey, Iran, India and the Far East.


The Nasser D. Khalili Collection holds examples of Islamic calligraphy that span six centuries and demonstrate the continuity of this central art form into the modern era. The holdings - nearly 300 in total - include exceptional items that feature the work of many of the most famous master calligraphers, including Seyh Hamdullah and Hafiz Osman.
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France.

Successor to the old Bibliothèque Royale, the Bibliothèque Nationale has assembled collections of Islamic manuscripts formed over the centuries and regularly augmented by purchases and gifts; these collections rank among the most important in Europe and cover nearly all subjects (total ca. 12,000). Especially noteworthy are some Quranic manuscripts of the first centuries after hijra. These are kept in the Département des Manuscrits, Division des Manuscrits Orientaux.

Photographs of some undated Quranic manuscripts written in Hijazi script at Bibliothèque Nationale can be seen in ref. 2. For catalogues of collection at Bibliothèque Nationale, please see ref. 1.


The Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago, Chicago, United States of America.

The Oriental Institute Museum holds a decent collection of Qur'anic manuscripts dated from second half of the first century of hijra (classified as 1st/2nd) onwards. The manuscripts are written in Makkan, Kufic and Maghribi scripts suggesting their origin from wide geographical locations in the Islamic world. The relevant reference to look for is the following:


This much-acclaimed work of Nabia Abbott has become a sort of standard text book for the students in the western world who are interested in the origins and history of Islamic calligraphy. The book begins with the origins of Arabic script and its development after the advent of Islam. The manuscripts from The Oriental Institute Museum serve as good examples to study various scripts.

The Islamic Collection in **The Chester Beatty Library** contains almost four thousand Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts including many superb copies of the Qur'an. The Islamic Collection is one of the finest in existence and is internationally renowned for the overall high quality and scope of its material. The Library houses examples of the earliest Islamic manuscripts, dated to the ninth and tenth centuries CE, through to those produced in the early years of the twentieth century.

The Islamic Collection consists of several sub-collections. Of these, the Qur'an Collection, comprising some 250 manuscripts, is of special importance and is rivalled only by that of the Topkapi Sarayi in Istanbul, Turkey. Manuscripts of note are a Qur'an of 972, the earliest dated Qur'an copied on paper, and another copied some nine centuries later for the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abdulmecid, the binding and illuminations of which are exceptionally exquisite. However, the real gem of the collection - and indeed one of the most treasured objects of the entire Library - is the splendid Qur'an copied by the famed calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwab in Baghdad in the year 1001.

The published manuscripts are in the following books:


**The Institute Of Oriental Studies**, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Among eighty-five thousand manuscripts in 65 living and dead Oriental languages, which are preserved in the St. Petersburg branch of **The Institute Of Oriental Studies** (formerly the Asiatic Museum founded in 1818), Russian Academy of Sciences, there are many rare or unique religious, historical, and scientific works awaiting their publication. **The Institute Of Oriental Studies** has recently started a project that deals with compiling the manuscripts in the electronic format. The
This institute houses one of the oldest Qur'anic manuscripts dated to the last half of the 8th century CE and has been published in the Issue 4: One Of The Most Important Qur'anic MSS In The World. It has 81 large parchment folios in Hijazi (i.e., Makkah or Madinan) script contain about 40% of the text of the Qur'an (full texts of 22 surahs and fragments of another 22). The manuscript reflects changes in the orthography and "lay-out" of the sacred text. Such changes were added to the text in red ink, probably a century after the date of copying. Simultaneously, the simple gaps which were left between the preceding surah and the beginning of the following surah were filled with coloured ornaments (very interesting compositions of triangles, arcs, intertwined or intersecting lines, sometimes evocative of nomadic jewelry) with surah titles and information about the number of ayat. The MSS was displayed at the exhibition "Pages of Perfection" (Paris - New York - Lugano - Salzburg) in 1995-1996. Exhibited at the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, at the Villa Favorita at Lugano, Switzerland and at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. The relevant publication is: