

## **SIN ACCOUNT OF HOW QURAN WRITTEN.**

Most Sunni Muslims accept the account given in Al-Bukhari Vol 6, Hadith 509-510 as representing the origin of the Quran.

Despite their acceptance, scholar Alfred-Louis de Premare notes that Al-Bukhari's version is actually a synthesis of 5 earlier traditions:

1. Abu Bakr as collector
2. Umar as collector
3. Uthman as collector
4. Tradition that Abu Bakr refuses to do what Muhammad never did.
5. Tradition that Zaid Ibn Thabit refuses to do what Muhammad never did.

[de Premare, 2004, p70-72]

There are also several traditions that differ from this 'official version'

1. Umar alone with no input from Abu Bakr
2. Abu Bakr commissioned Zaid to write it on bits of leather, palm branches etc with no input from Umar. Then after Abu Bakr's death, Umar has Zaid put them on a 'single sheet'.
3. Umar comes to Abu Bakr concerned that the Quran needs to be written down, but Abu Bakr refuses to do what the prophet did not do. After Abu Bakr dies, Umar has the Quran copied on leaves.
4. Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad (as well as the 4th 'Rashidun' Caliph) was first to collect the Quran
5. Salim bin Ma'qil compiled the text immediately after Muhammad's death.
6. Muhammad's wife Aisha had her own copy of the Quran

[Shoemaker, Creating the Quran, 2022, p24]

Islamic sources also mention other versions of the Quran that were attributed to Muhammad's companions. They had different verse numbers than today's version:

1. Ubay Ibn Ka'b. His Quran was used in Syria
2. Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ud. His Quran was used in Kufa.
3. Abu Musa al-Ashari used in Basra
4. Miqdad Ibn al-Aswad used in Hims

We get further variations from the "History of Medina' by Ibn Shabba (d876). This is roughly contemporary with Al-Bukhari but it differs from his account in a number of ways:

1. Abu Bakr has NO involvement in the collection of the Quran
2. One tradition has Umar beginning the task of collecting it but was murdered before he could complete it.
3. Another tradition says that Umar owned a codex of the Quran and he disagreed with Ubay Ibn Ka'b over what should be in the Quran.
4. Umar and Zayd 'proof read' Ubay's Quran and make regular changes to it.
5. By the time Umar becomes Caliph the Quran had already been collected in multiple independent versions, with each being favoured by different regions. Umar then tries to assert the authority of the 'Medinan' version against those of Syria and Iraq
6. Traditions about Uthman's involvement are examined. They also appear to show that Uthman was not so much collecting the Quran but trying to correct versions that were already in circulation.

## **The Islamic sources suggest that large parts of the Quran were lost or missing.**

### **Some Verses were LOST**

*Many (of the passages) of the Qur'an that were sent down were known by those who died on the day of Yamama...but they were not known (by those who) survived them, nor were they written down, nor had Abu Bakr, Umar, or Uthman (by that time) collected the Qur'an, nor were they found with even one (person) after them.*

(Ibn Abi Dawud, Kitab al-Masahif p.23)

### **Some Verses DISAPPEARED**

*It is reported from Ismail ibn Ibrahim from Ayyub from Naafi from Ibn Umar who said: "Let none of you say 'I have acquired the whole of the Qur'an'. How does he know what all of it is when much of the Qur'an has disappeared? Rather let him say 'I have acquired what has survived.'*

(as-Suyuti, [d. 1500sAD] Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an, p.524).

### **Some Verses were FORGOTTEN**

*We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) Bara'at. I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it: "If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust".*

(Sahih Muslim, [d. 875 AD] Vol. 2:2286, p.501)

Sura Bara'at is Sura 9 of today's Quran which is 129 verses long. How can the eternal unchanging Quran is missing 129 verses?

### **Some Verses were CANCELLED**

*We used to read a verse of the Qur'an revealed in their connection, but later the verse was canceled. It was: "convey to our people on our behalf the information that we have met our Lord, and He is pleased with us, and has made us pleased".*

(Sahih al-Bukhari, [d. 870AD] Vol. 5:416, pg.288)

### **Some Verses went MISSING**

*"Allah sent Muhammad (saw) with the Truth and revealed the Holy Book to him, and among what Allah revealed, was the Verse of the Rajam (the stoning of married persons, male and female, who commit adultery) and we did recite this Verse and understood and memorized it. Allah's Apostle (saw) did carry out the punishment of stoning and so did we after him. I am afraid that after a long time has passed, somebody will say, 'By Allah, we do not find the Verse of the Rajam in Allah's Book', and thus they will go astray by leaving an obligation which Allah has revealed"*

(Sahih al-Bukhari, [d. 870AD] Vol. 8:817, pg.539)

### **Some Verses were OVERLOOKED**

*Khuzaimah ibn Thabit said: "I see you have overlooked (two) verses and have not written them". They said "And which are they?" He replied "I had it directly (tilqiyya-'automatically, spontaneously') from the messenger of Allah (saw) (Surah 9, ayah 128) ... Uthman said "I bear witness that these verses are from Allah"*

(Ibn Abi Dawud, Kitab al-Masahif p.11)

### **Some Verses were CHANGED**

*Abu Yunus, freedman of Aishah, Mother of Believers, reported: Aishah ordered me to transcribe the Holy Qur'an and asked me to let her know*

when I should arrive at the verse *Haftdhuu alaas-salaati waas-salaatiil-wustaa wa qummuu lillaahi qaanitiin* (2.238). When I arrived at the verse I informed her and she ordered: Write it in this way, *Hafidhuu alaas-salaati waas-salaatiil-wustaa wa salaatil'asri wa qummuu lillaahi qaanitiin*. She added that she had heard it so from the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) (Muwatta Imam Malik, [d.795 AD] p.64)

### **Some Verses were MODIFIED**

Altogether al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf made eleven modifications in the reading of the Uthmanic text. ... In al-Baqarah (Surah 2.259) it originally read *Lam yatasanna waandhur*, but it was altered to *Lam yatasannah*... In al-Ma'ida (Surah 5.48) it read *Shari ya'atan wa minhaajaan*, but it was altered to *shir 'atawwa minhaajaan*. (Ibn Abi Dawud, Kitab al-Masahif p.117)

### **Some Verses were SUBSTITUTED**

But Allah said "None of Our Revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten but We substitute something better or similar."  
(Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 6, Book 61, Number 527)

### **Some Verses were EATEN BY SHEEP**

It was narrated that Aishah said: "The Verse of stoning and of breastfeeding an adult ten times was revealed, and the paper was with me under my pillow. When the Messenger of Allah died, we were preoccupied with his death, and a tame sheep came in and ate it."  
(Sunan ibn Majah, d. 1277)

## **SUMMARY**

Lost  
Disappeared  
Forgotten  
Cancelled  
Missing  
Overlooked  
Changed  
Modified  
Substituted  
Eaten by Sheep



### **Other Sunni Traditions**

We also have the 'Book of Major Classes' by Ibn Sa'd (d 845). This is a collection of biographies of Muhammad that gives us a lot of information about the Quran.

1. The accounts of the collection vary. He says that it was UMAR who first collected the Quran on 'sheets' but cites another tradition that says that Umar was assassinated BEFORE he could collect the Quran
2. He reports traditions that both Zaid Ibn Thabit and Ubay Ibn Ka'b served Muhammad as scribes.
3. Other traditions say that the Quran had been collected at least in part during Muhammad's lifetime.
4. There is no mention of Abu Bakr or Uthman collecting the Quran
5. There is no mention of the codex of Hafsa, Muhammad's wife which were used by Uthman in Al-Bukhari's version.
- 6.

[Ibn Sa'd, 1904-28,3.1.119-56]

Shoemaker summarises this situation very well with the following quote on p30  
*'By now I hope it is sufficiently clear that the pretence of unanimity regarding Uthman's collection of the Quran is not only deceptive but false. The Islamic tradition instead reports a tangle of conflicting and disjointed memories about the origins of the Quran rather than anything remotely approaching unanimity. In effect, the Quran's production is seemingly assigned, almost at random, to one of the first 3 Caliphs'*

Burton agrees: *'the reports are a mass of confusions, contradictions and inconsistencies. By their nature, they represent the product of a lengthy process of evolution, accretion and 'improvement'. They were framed in response to a wide variety of progressing needs... The existence of such reports makes it clear that the Muslims were confused. The earliest stage of the traditions on the collection of the Quran did consist in incompatible attributions of the first collection to Abu Bakr, to Umar, to Uthman'* [Burton, John, The Collection of the Quran 1977, p225,229]

As does Claude Gilliot: *'because the misadventures detailed about the transmission and codification of the Quran- as both orally delivered and transmitted in writing-are so great, the ancient Muslim narratives on these subjects offer no real clarity about what 'Uthmanic codex' means. Secondly, even if Muslims believe that the Quran we have now is the 'Uthmanic codex', our analysis of Muslim narratives on the matter does not leave us with the same certainty'*

[Gilliot, 2006, 'Creation of a fixed Text' in the Cambridge Companion to the Quran, p46, emphasis added]

Nicholas Sinai suggests that because the Arab conquests occurred so quickly and widely, the early Muslims would have been more concerned with consolidating their conquests rather than with the 'meticulous' preservation of the words of the Prophet.

*'Although the Islamic tradition is generally concerned to depict the early Muslims as meticulously passing on detailed historical and exegetical remembrances of the Prophet's companions, it seems rather more probable that during the age of the conquests the majority of converts were not sufficiently preoccupied with the interpretation of the Quran*

*in order for the community's prophetic understanding of it to be fully preserved. As a result, later Muslims needed to rediscover and hermeneutically reinvent their scripture'* [Sinai, Nicholas, 2014, When did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part 1, p291]

Shoemaker also notes that there is little evidence for any kind of 'Islamic State' before Abd al Malik, who ruled from Damascus, NOT Medina. If one accepts the SIN where Caliphs ruled from Medina, Damascus and Basra were >1000km away from Medina, and any communication would have taken at least 20 days ONE WAY.  
'Accordingly, the thought that the authorities in Medina could somehow directly police the contours of religious discourse in these faraway places seems preposterous" [p33]

The haphazard nature of the Islamic tradition is described by Shoemaker very well in the following quote [Shoemaker, Creating the Quran, p34]

***'The highly confused and contradictory reports about the origins of the Quranic text in the early Islamic tradition themselves verify that there was no such decisive event in these early decades that left a lasting imprint in the collective memory. Instead we find disorganised efforts to assign the text of the Quran to the authority of one of these early leaders and to secure its fixation close to the life of Muhammad. One has the sense that the Sunni traditions of the 8th century were haphazardly identifying one or another of these figures to serve as the Quran's guarantor. It fell to Bukhari in the 9th century to knit all these memories into a coherent account involving a collective action by all 3 of the first caliphs that could serve as the canonical narrative of the Quran's composition for the Sunni tradition going forward'***

## **SHI'ITE TRADITIONS**

- The Shi'ite traditions say that it was Ali and NOT Abu Bakr, Umar, or Uthman that collected the Quran
- This version was reportedly much longer than the Uthmanic version and it was allegedly falsified by the first 3 Caliphs because it named Ali as the rightful successor of Muhammad
- This is part of a greater narrative of persecution that the Shi'ites or 'Alids' (the party of Ali) allege the Umayyad were engaged in. They did this purportedly to maintain their spiritual authority over the Muslim masses and their political authority over the empire. *'Hence Umayyad rule had every reason to obscure or distort this past in an effort to justify the present and consolidate it. It accomplished this through violence and censorship...In an attempt to justify these measures, caliphal power set up a complex system of propaganda, censorship and historical falsification. First it altered the text of the Quran and forged an entire body of traditions falsely ascribed to the Prophet, drawing great scholars, judges, jurist, preachers and historians into its service-all this within a policy of repression that was as savage as it was methodical, aimed at its opponents at large, but at Alids [Shi'ites] in particular "*

[Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, The Silent Quran and the Speaking Quran, 2016, 163-165]

## **IS THE SIN ACCOUNT HISTORICALLY RELIABLE?**

- Despite the desires of both Sunni and Shia to present a reliable account of the Quran being transmitted by the Prophet Muhammad and written down within a few decades, this is simply not consistent with the historical and linguistic evidence.

- Scholarly research has highlighted several significant problems. They are listed below and followed by quotes from scholars to support them. In brief they are:

- A. The defective nature of the early Arabic script
- B. The lack of any real political or religious cohesion in the early Arab empire
- C. The time frame for generating monotheist scriptures is usually measured in centuries

- The unbelievably short time frame from generating an authoritative scripture is described by Chase Robinson's assessment of the improbability of the Uthmanic tradition.

*'The complicated and protracted processes that generated monotheistic scriptures in antiquity and late antiquity are generally measured in centuries or at least several decades; the tradition would have us believe that in the case of Islam they were telescoped into about 20 years. Are we really to think that within a single generation God's word moved from individual lines and chapters scribbled on camel's shoulder blades and rocks to complete, single, fixed and authoritative text on papyrus or vellum? It would be virtually unprecedented. It is furthermore unlikely in the light of what we know of early Arabic: the nature of the early Arabic script, which only imperfectly described vowels and consonants, and conventions of memorisation and reading, which often privileged memory over written text, would militate against the very rapid production of the fixed and authoritative text that the tradition describes'*

[Robinson, Chase, Abd al-Malik. Makers of the Muslim World, 2005, 101-102]

Angelica Neuwirth also states that the canonical Sunni narrative 'seems to deviate from what is usual in the history of religions' [Shoemaker p39]

- The historical and archaeological evidence confirms the following:
  7. that prior to Abd al-Malik Muhammad is not named in inscriptions or papyri.
  8. There are coins from the time of Muawiya that mention 'Muhammad' but these coins also have Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian symbols as well. They are therefore highly unlikely to be minted by a 'Muslim'.
  9. The public proclamation of 'Muhammad' only really begins from Abd al-Malik.
  10. This is also the same time period that we get the earliest Quranic manuscripts and supports the hypothesis that the idea of the 'Quran as the word of God' only really began with Abd al-Malik.

- We also see that prior to Muawiya we do not even have the basic elements of a functioning government. Robinson also notes that Uthman was in no position to credibly accomplish what the SIN says he did '*Uthman was deeply unpopular in many quarters; his reign was short and contentious.*

- Therefore, despite what the SIN says about the time 'rightly guided caliphs', the time before Muawiya was a period of upheaval and civil war. Following his reign we again have a similar period of turmoil until Abd al-Malik emerges as Caliph.

*'Abd al-Malik would emerge as the leader of a potent and well-organised state that would be fully capable of what the tradition improbably ascribes to Uthman...there is near universal agreement from every quarter that Abd al-Malik was instrumental in establishing and enforcing the canonical version of the Quran. By comparison, the traditions regarding various earlier collections appear to be much more darkly hued'*

[Shoemaker, p42]

- Therefore after examining the evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that the Quran was NOT compiled in a 20 year period between in 652 by Uthman as stated by the SIN. Instead, it was more likely compiled closer to the end of the 7th century or early 8th century by Abd Al-Malik

## The Evolution of the Quran: the Roles of Abd al-Malik and Al Hajjaj

[De Premare]

- The SIN says that the Quran we have today was canonised under the Caliph Uthman in 652. Copies were then supposedly sent out to major centres of the empire.
- The problem with this is that we have conservative Muslim commentator Ibn Abi Dawud al-Sijistani making a number of references to the role of Abd Al-Malik and his lieutenant Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf being intimately involved in the collection of the Quran.
- We also have Monk of Beth Hale referring to the “Quran that Muhammad has taught you” and the ‘writing of the Cow’ as separate writings. This ‘writing of the Cow’ is Surah 2 in today’s Quran.
- The same thing is mentioned by John of Damascus (735) who worked in the court of Abd al-Malik. While he does not mention ‘Quran’ he mentions a ‘book’ that was composed by ‘Mamed’ or Muhammad. He also mentions the writings of the ‘Cow’, ‘Table’, ‘Woman’ which corresponds to surahs of today’s Quran. He also mentions the ‘Camel of God’ which is NOT in today’s Quran.
- Thus we have 2 independent witnesses that confirm that parts of today’s Quran were not recognised as part of the Quran in the 8th century.
- Al-Baladhuri quotes Abd al-Malik saying *“I am afraid of dying during the month of Ramadan. That is the month in which I was born, it is the month which I was weaned, it is the month in which **I gathered together the Quran**, and it is the month in which I was sworn allegiance [as the caliph]”* (Emphasis added)
- Ibn Sa’ad (785-845) quotes his teacher Al-Waqidi who describes a visit to Medina by Abd al-Malik. This occurred after the end of the civil war that followed the rebellion by Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr. He was defeated around 693 by Al-Hajjaj and in 695 Abd al-Malik went to Medina. He enjoins the following:  
*“ People of Medina, you had the greatest right to be linked to the first work; whereas there have flowed over you from the East some hadiths which we do not know, but we only know the reading of the Quran. **So you should cling to what is in your mushaf**, around which the imam so unjustly treated has gathered you. May God have mercy on him, as he had consulted Zayd Ibn Tabit about this, and he was an excellent advisor for Islam, may God have mercy on him. They both firmly established what they established, and they abolished that which they diverged from”*
- Ibn Sa’ad was writing about 100 years after these events. It was also 40 years AFTER the Quran was supposedly standardised under Uthman. Despite this he says that the Medinans should cling to what is in THEIR MUSHAF. If there was indeed ONE Quran, then Abd al-Malik would have encouraged them to cling to THE MUSHAF, not THEIR Mushaf. This means that there was a ‘Medinan Mushaf’ decades after there was supposedly only ONE Quran for the whole empire.
- Some scholars contend that Abd al-Malik introduced the tradition of an ‘Uthmanic codex’ to lend legitimacy to his version of the Quran.

- D. By associating it with Uthman, it gave it a more impressive pedigree to those saw Abd al-Malik as a later intruder. In order to give it scholarly legitimacy, he recruited Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri to promulgate the tradition that Abd al-Malik's Quran was actually Uthman's [Creating the Quran, p48]
- E. *'The Mushaf Uthman is the 'conventional name of the official version imposed by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik'* [Pierre Larcher, Pre Islamic Arabic, Koranic Arabic, Classical Arabic: a continuum, 2010,p266]
- Ibn Shabba (died 878) (History of Medina) quotes the following: *'Abd al-Aziz bin Amran told us, according to Muhriz Ibn Thabit, mawla of Maslama bin Abd al-Malik, who had it from his father, who said: I was one of the guards of Hajjaj bin Yusuf. **Al-Hajjaj wrote the mushaf. Then he sent them to the military capitals (al-amsar).** He sent one to Medina. The members of Uthman's family disapproved of that. They were told: 'Get out the mushaf of Uthman bin Affan, that we may read it! They answered: it was destroyed on the day when Uthman was killed''*
  - The Egyptian historian Ibn Duqmaq (died 809) wrote: *"Al Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi wrote Musahif and sent them to all the military capitals [al-amsar]. One he had sent to Egypt. When he saw that, Abd al-Aziz bin Marwan went into a rage, for at the time he was serving as governor of Egypt for his brother Abd al-Malik. He says: 'he permits himself to send a mushaf to the very military district where I am serving, me!'"*
  - Al Samhudi (d 1506) quotes Malik bin Anas (died 796) saying: *'Reading from the Mushaf at the Mosque was not done by people in the past. It was al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf who first instituted it..'* Ibn Zabala said: *'Malik bin Anas reported to me: 'Al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf sent the mushaf to the capitals. He sent a large one to Medina. He was the first to sent Masahif to the cities''*
  - Shia scholar Al-Sijistani (d971) describes how Al-Hajjaj regularly inspected the work of scribes and considered his own judgments regarding the text of the Quran to be inspired on the level of Muhammad himself. [
  - Both Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim record a Hadith which records al-A'mash describing how Al Hajjaj gave directions on how the Quran is to be composed. It says *'I heard Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf say, in a speech delivered from the pulpit, 'compose the Quran as Gabriel composed it: the writings that include the mention of the Cow, and the writings that include mention of the women, and the writings that mention the family of Imran'*
  - If the Quran was definitively canonised by Uthman in 652, it makes no sense for Al-Hajjaj to say this. If however, it was still a **'work in progress'** and the canon was not fixed, it makes perfect sense.
  - It is also consistent with John of Damascus and the 'Monk of Beth Hale' who BOTH record that the writings of the 'cow' and 'the woman' were SEPARATE WRITINGS to the 'Quran'. These two independent sources are **contemporaries** of Al-Hajjaj.
  - In addition we have Qatari bin Di'ama (died 735) discuss the writing of the Cow as if it were a SEPARATE WRITING. He narrates how al-Abbas, the uncle of Muhammad was supposed to have quoted it as a rallying cry at the battle of Hunayn (630 according to



the SIN. Ibn Kathir (d 1373) says that something similar happened at the Battle of Yamama (633 according to SIN)

- Ibn Asakir (d 1176) also describes how Al-Hajjaj is supposed to have condemning the codex of Ibn Masud. One of his sources for this information is the scholar Asim from Kufa. This is very significant because Asim was one of the 7 readers whose version of the Quran is accepted as 'canonical' by the SIN. It is also significant because one of Asim's transmitters or 'rawis' was HAFS, and his version of the Quran is used by more than 80% of Muslims today.
- Ibn Asakir also describes a 'pious legend' about a slave girl of Muhammad (Umm Ayman) who apparently would not stop crying after his death. When asked by Abu Bakr and Umar why she is crying, she is supposed to have answered '*I am crying because the inspiration has stopped*'. When Al-Hajjaj heard this story he apparently said '*Umm Ayman lied: I only word by inspiration*'
- Ibn Abi Dawud describes how Al-Hajjaj divided the texts of the Quran into reading sections. He says' *According to Mutahar bin Khalifa, Abu Muhammad al-Himmani said 'we worked on that project for four months and Al-Hajjaj read it every night'* [Masahif, p120]
- When one looks at these stories one may get the impression that Al-Hajjaj as 'governor of Iraq' would be acting on his own initiative, in having his own team of scribes, deciding what went in the codex and sending copies to the various parts of the empire. To address this Ibn Asakir records other sayings where Al Hajjaj extols the virtues of Abd al-Malik as Allah's chosen one.
- This makes sense as it is hard to believe that a ruler like Abd al-Malik who went to all the trouble of making a major theological statement with the Dome of the Rock would have allowed his officer to send 'official' codices to the major capitals without the approval of the Caliph.
- So we see a number of independent commentators telling us the following story:
  - F. That at the time of Abd al-Malik and Al-Hajjaj, the Quran as we know it did not exist. Both Islamic and non-Islamic sources suggest that writings in today's Quran were separate 'books' at the time of Abd al-Malik.
  - G. No one was able to find an 'Uthmanic Codex'
  - H. That Al-Hajjaj had an integral role in collecting material that eventually went into the official codex. He also had a key role in composing it.
  - I. He sent copies of this codex to the various cities of the empire with the approval of Abd al-Malik .
- De Premaire summarises this as follows: '*These indications..from quite early on regarding the role of Al-Hajjaj in Quranic affairs, and in particular concerning the first shipment of an official mushaf to the capital cities, occurred when such a pride of place is usually attributed to Uthman. They further emphasise the fact that, even in very early times, there had been vain search of the latter's [Uthman's] mushaf*' p207
- He goes on to say that '*taking into account all these facts, one can surmise that the suggestion by Al-Hajjaj to the scribes signifies a particular moment of the 'talif' [composition], when the issue arose of whether to revise and add one or the other such writings in 'composing' them, so as to fold them into larger works. It seems clear that such a conclusion goes against the canonical version of the history of the Quran which*

*holds that Zayd ibn Thabit, at the time of Uthman, was the only author of that kind of 'composition' [p208]*

## **SHOEMAKER: CREATING THE QURAN**

- Much of the evidence suggests that the real instigator for the compilation of the Quran was Abd al-Malik and his lieutenant, Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yusef who served Abd al-Malik as governor of Iraq and the 'viceroy' of the Caliphate.
- Al-Hajjaj consolidated Abd al-Malik's rule by destroying the rival caliphate of Abdallah Ibn al-Zubayr. He also led campaigns in Iraq against rival factions eg the Kharijites and the Shia, some of which involved massacres [De Premaire, 2002,292-295]
- The hypothesis that Abd al Malik was the one who standardised the Quran goes as far back as Alphonse Mingana(1916) and Paul Casanova (1911)
- SIN scholars argue that Abd al-Malik only made minor 'cosmetic' changes to the Quran eg diacritical marks etc but this is disproved by the fact that the earliest manuscripts we have date from the time of Abd al-Malik and indeed **after** his reign LACK these features.
- This is confirmed by the foremost authority on early Quranic manuscripts, Francois Deroche *'If we turn to the reports stating that the diacritics were introduced in the course of Al-Hajjaj's 'Masahif project, and that the 'ta' and 'ya' were selected in order to distinguish between the second and third person of some verbal forms, we have to admit that the manuscript evidence says otherwise'* [Deroche, 'Qurans of the Umayyads 2014, p 138]
- There is well attested tradition that says that al-Hajjaj standardised the Quran and sent copies to Egypt, Damascus, Medina, Mecca, Kufa and Basra. He also ordered that all of the earlier Qurans were collected and destroyed. *'As compensation, the owner was paid 60 dirham'*. It also says that Al-Hajjaj was the first to establish the practice of reading the Quran aloud in Mosques [Hamdan, Omar, 'The Second Masahif project: A Step Toward the Canonisation of the Quranic Text, 2010 p823]
- **[See above, Ibn Duqmaq and al Samhudi]**
- Therefore, despite the SIN saying that Uthman did these, this tradition says that it was in fact Al-Hajjaj [De Premaire, 2010, p204-205]

## **WHAT DO NON MUSLIM SOURCES SAY ABOUT THE COMPILATION OF THE QURAN?**

### **A.The Quran was NOT a single scripture in the 7th Century**

#### **John of Damascus (675-749)**

- John is the most important non-Islamic source for the early history of the Quran and is the first writer to discuss Muhammad's followers having sacred writings.
- In 730 he wrote the 'Fount of Knowledge' in which he describes a number of Christian heresies. When discussing the religion of 'Muhammad's followers' **he does not call it Islam**. Instead, he refers to it as the **'heresy of the Ishmaelites'**
- In this he describes a 'book' that was composed by 'Mamed' or Muhammad, but does NOT mention the Quran. He also mentions the writings of the 'Cow', 'Table', 'Woman'

which corresponds to surahs of today's Quran. He also mentions the 'Camel of God' which is NOT in today's Quran.

- John is an important witness because his father and grandfather had been involved in the financial administration of Damascus under the final years of Roman rule and the first years of Arab rule.
- John's father (Sarjun ibn Mansur) served both Muawiya and Abd al-Malik and John followed him, serving Abd al-Malik until he left for Jerusalem in the early 8th century to live out the rest of his life as a monk.
- Some scholars regard John as effectively the head of Umayyad civil administration and *'these experiences serving in high office within the Umayyad caliphate ensure that John was well positioned to have gathered some of the best information about Islam that could be acquired in Damascus. Accordingly, any differences between what John reports about Muhammad's followers and the memories of later Islamic traditions cannot be pushed aside as polemical falsification. At the time when John was writing, there was little reason to assume that 'Islamic practice was developed to such an extent to warrant the criticism that John distorts Islamic beliefs and practices'* [Shoemaker, p51, quoting Shadler, 2018,p101]
- Thus the fact that John does NOT talk about Islam, Muslims, or the Quran strongly suggests that neither Muslims, Islam nor the Quran of the SIN existed at the time John was in the court of Abd al-Malik. It was still a 'work in progress' probably unfolding before his eyes.
- John describes a number of things about the 'heresy of the Ishmaelites':
  - A. It began with a certain 'Mamed' who read the old and new testaments and then claimed that a 'writing' or 'graphe' had come down to him from heaven.
  - B. He then compiled these 'laughable things' into a book (biblos)
  - C. Mamed gave each of these writings titles like 'the writing of the Cow', 'the writing of the woman' and 'the writing of the table'. These would correspond to Sura 2, Surah 4 and Surah 5 of today's Quran.
  - D. John mentions a mysterious further 'writing' that deals with the 'Camel of God. This is not in today's Quran and there is much speculation about its origins.
- So John mentions the existence of several independent 'writings', two of which are also mentioned by Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim [see above]. *'Clearly, we must conclude, the sacred Ishmaelite writings that John knew in this era and describes in his account of their beliefs 'cannot have been the Quran as we know it in its present form...'* [Shoemaker, p51, quoting Shadler]
- *"Indeed John is quite explicit that what he relates is material containing writings that were attributed to Muhammad that were available to him. The faint echoes of this writing that we find now in the Quran thus reflect 'the later result of mental labour aimed at the redaction, selection and stylistic reorganisation of this text, carried out during the final composition, based on various pre-existing texts not yet formally fixed and rendered immutable'. On this basis alone it seems highly unlikely that the Quran as we now have it had been completely fixed by the turn of the 8th century, when John, who again was extremely well-informed and well-connected, wrote his description of the writings Muhammad's followers ascribed to him and revered as sacred scripture'* [Shoemaker, p52, quoting De Premaire,2010 emphasis added]
- 
- 
-

- **The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bet Hale**
- Like John of Damascus, this text mentions the 'writing of the Cow' as a separate writing. It describes a debate between a Christian and a Muslim where the Christian mentions the 'writing of the Cow' and also refers to the Quran as a separate writing.
- The dating of this text is disputed. Some put it at early 8th century but more recently it is thought that it is 9th century.
- This is based on the Islamic reference to Muhammad's instruction by the monk Sergius Bahira, which was a Syriac Christian legend that was not known before the late 8th century.
- This same legend ALSO identifies the 'writing of the Cow' and the 'Quran' as separate writings. Of course it is entirely possible that the legend of Sergius Bahira inspired the reference in the 'Disputation' so they may not be independent witnesses.
- Despite this, they BOTH confirm what John of Damascus was saying: that there was a 'writing of the Cow that was SEPARATE to the Quran
- It should also be emphasised that these references would have been popular among Nestorian East Syrian circles where as John of Damascus would have been read by west Syrian Monophysites.
- In this sense then, we have **independent sources** for the 'writing of the Cow' and the Quran being **separate documents**
- ***This means that it is highly unlikely that the Quran was canonised with Sura 2 (the Cow) as part of the Quran in 652 ie more than 50 years earlier.***
- Therefore, prior to John of Damascus, ie early 8th century,
- NO WRITER, Christian or otherwise shows any awareness that 'Muhammad's followers' had any sacred book of their own. Given the interest that Christians and Jews had in preserving their own scriptures, it is beyond belief to suggest that they would not have at least investigated a rival 'Islamic' scripture sometime in the 7th century if indeed it really existed. *'They show complete ignorance of any distinctive corpus of scripture claimed by Muhammad's followers until the early 8th century. This lengthy silence is quite telling: such silence , as they say, speaks volumes'* [Shoemaker p57]

This is clearer when one looks at Robert Hoyland's 870 page examination of Non Islamic Sources "Seeing Islam as Others Saw It".

1. This catalogues over 130 sources about the Arab religious movement allegedly founded by Muhammad.
  2. 60 of them are from AD622-AD722.
  3. NONE mention a sacred text used in any capacity by 'Muhammad's followers'
- "This is nothing short of incredible if, as many would suppose, the Quran was already collected by 650 in a standard canonical form and was believed by Muhammad's followers to be direct revelations from their god"* [Shoemaker, p57]

## The Quran was put together by Al-Hajjaj, NOT Uthman

### **The Letter of Leo III to Umar II (about 730)**

- This is a series of writings thought to represent an exchange between the Byzantine emperor Leo III (reigned 717-741) and Caliph Umar II (reigned 717-720). Apparently, Umar wrote to Leo inviting him to convert to Islam and Leo responded to this with a critique of Islam.
- Scholars regard these letters as being written during first half of the 8th century and thus it is contemporary with the source of John of Damascus.
- In essence, Umar argues that both the Old Testament and New Testaments were falsified by the Jews and Christians respectively. Leo then defends the scriptures at length before then claiming that Muslims also falsified scripture.
- Specifically, Leo claims that *'But you are yourself wont to make such falsifications, especially in the case of a certain Al-Hajjaj, who was appointed governor of Persia by you, who gathered all your ancient books and wrote another according to his taste and distributed it throughout all your lands. For such a thing was quite easy to accomplish with a single people with a single language, as it was in fact done- excepting only a few works of Abu Turab [ie Ali, for Al-Hajjaj] was not able to destroy them completely'* [emphasis added]
- Thus Leo appears to be saying that falsification of the Christian scriptures would not be possible because they were used by so many **different peoples in different lands in different languages**. In contrast, he says that the fact that the Arabs had a single language in a single area made it relatively simple for someone to codify and control what went into their scriptures. He identifies this someone as Al-Hajjaj.
- Given that Al-Hajjaj was second in command to Abd al-Malik who was the most powerful of the Umayyad caliphs, and that Al-Hajjaj also served his son al-Walid, it is no surprise that Leo III knows about him. Leo was 33 when he became emperor and Al-Hajjaj died only 3 years earlier.
- Indeed, Gerald Hawting describes Al-Hajjaj as the *'dominant figure in the sources'* for this period. [Hawting, Gerald, The First Dynasty of Islam: the Umayyad Caliphate, 2000, p58]
- It is also interesting that Leo mentions the works of Ali. This suggests that Leo was aware that the Shi'ites, ie the supporters of Ali contested the authenticity of the Umayyad Quran.
- This fits well with the analysis of Hamdan who argues that *'real motive [for producing a standard version of the Quran]..should be sought in the political conflicts between the Shi'ites in Kufa and the ruling Umayyads which had escalated since the rule of Ibn Ziyad (675-685)'* [Hamdan, The Second Masahif Project, 2010, p798]
- This is another INDEPENDENT source from outside the SIN that confirms what even Islamic sources tell us: that the caliph who 'canonised' or codified the Quran was NOT Uthman but rather Abd al-Malik through Al Hajjaj. This is because, unlike his predecessors, Abd al-Malik was the first Arab ruler to have a state apparatus that was powerful enough and with enough central control to accomplish this
- *'We have here, then, a contemporary report from outside the Islamic tradition that confirms what the Islamic sources relate about Al-Hajjaj's production of a new standard Quran to replace the various regional versions and their divergent memories of Muhammad's revelations. Leo's account closely matches the description in these sources of Al-Hajjaj together the regional codices that had emerged independently in the main centres of Islam and harmonising their differences into a new, official standard'*

version...Leo's letter also notes, like the Islamic sources, that this program of standardisation involved the destruction of these older regional versions, although he notes that some of these traditions managed to survive Al-Hajjaj's purge. In this regard, Leo singles out certain works of Abu Turab-that is-Ali...**In contrast to Uthman, who is said to have attempted the same, al-Hajjaj and Abd al-Malik were actually in a position to accomplish this, with a powerful and effective state apparatus..**For what it is worth, Leo's letter says nothing about any sort of prior collection of the Quran by earlier figures from Islamic history, Uthman or otherwise" [Shoemaker, p54-55, emphasis added]

## Abraham of Tiberias (820)

- This is an Arabic text dating around 820 that purports to record a dialogue between the Melkite Christian Abraham and the emir Abd al Rahman al Hashimi.
- Abraham appears to be very aware of the SIN key figures including Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Ibn Abbas and Muawiya.
- Following this, he discusses the Quran and states that *'after them it was al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf who composed and arranged it'*
- Therefore, according to Abraham, while others may have been involved in gathering together some of the material of the Quran, it was **Al-Hajjaj, NOT Uthman**, who produced the final version that was deemed to be authoritative.

## The Apology of Al Kindi (820-830)

- This was composed during the reign of Al-Mamun (813-833) and it is clear that Al-Kindi is aware of the various Islamic traditions regarding the Quran.
- He mentions traditions that claim the following:
  4. Ali collected the Quran soon after Muhammad's death.
  5. Abu Bakr arranged an initial collection of the Quran although Ali's supporters would not accept it.
  6. Uthman was bothered by the collections of Ubay Ibn Ka'ab and Ibn Mas'ud
- But his most pertinent statement is where he confronts the [Muslim] reader with the following statements about Al-Hajjaj [Al-Kindi, 1885]
  7. ***'You know that Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf collected the codices and removed things from them*** [Al-Kindi, 1885, p78
  8. ***'Then there was the intervention by Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, who left no copy that he did not acquire, and he removed many things from it*** [Al Kindi, 1885,p82]
  9. ***'All that I have said is drawn from your own [ie Islamic] authorities, and no argument have I advanced but what is based on evidence accepted by yourselves'***

***'Clearly, Al-Kindi, like Abraham has drawn his information about the Quran from the Islamic tradition, and yet both writers show that the collection of the Quran, at least as these Christian writers had learned of it, was largely the work of Al-Hajjaj, who made some substantial changes to the contents of the text and established its final form. And what these Christian authors were hearing from their Islamic contemporaries in the early 9th century clearly indicates that Al-Hajjaj did far more than merely add some diacritics and arrange the suras in their current form'***  
[Shoemaker, p56]

Some scholars have tried to discredit Al-Kindi but many others such as Guillaume Dye note that Al-Kindi is doing just what Al-Bukhari did around the same time: transmit a writing that was in circulation before them and that was accepted by the 'Muslim' community.

***'Like Bukhari, Al-Kindi- and Abraham of Tiberias as well for that matter-bears witness in the early 9th century to a tradition from the early 8th century that was circulating in both Christian and Islamic circles'*** [Shoemaker p58]

Scholar Nicholas Sinai also concedes that 'the fact that two Christian texts, which are not obviously interdependent, as well as various Islamic reports, concurrently ascribe to al-Hajjaj measures of textual dissemination and suppression strongly indicates that something of the sort really was afoot' [Sinai, Nicholas, 'When did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran reach Closure part 1, BJOAS, 2014, p282]

## **OTHER EVIDENCE**

### **Inscriptions**

- Perhaps the earliest written record of Quranic verses actually come from the Dome of the Rock. It is widely accepted that these were ordered by Abd al-Malik around AD691-2.
- If the Quran was actually canonised and available from 652, WHY is there no inscription of any verses before Abd al-Malik in 692? We see inscriptions from Muawiya before this time, so it cannot be that there were no inscriptions ordered by the ruler.
- The most obvious answer for why Quranic inscriptions don't appear before Abd al-Malik is because the Quranic writings DID NOT EXIST before Abd al-Malik.
- Despite this, these inscriptions DIFFER from today's canonical Quran in several areas. This would not have been possible if the Quran were already FULLY canonised by Uthman 40 years earlier in AD652.

### **Manuscripts**

- We also see that the earliest manuscripts of the Quran come from the reign of Abd al-Malik around the early 8th century. This has been confirmed paleographically by world expert Francois Deroche. [Deroche Qurans of the Umayyads, 2014,p94-97]
- Even though Deroche dates the Parisino-Petropolitanos manuscript to the end of the 7th-early 8th century, he notes that it does not fit with the SIN. *'when looking at the transcription of the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus, one sees that this copy as well as those which belong to these chronological strata of these transmissions are unable to prevent what the Uthmanic edition was supposed to achieve* [ie variations in the Quran text]
- Chase Robinson disputes the accuracy of palaeography but also confirms that no manuscript can be dated to the time of Uthman even if one uses paleography. He notes that *'one scholar's 7th century leaf, another may assign to the 8th or 9th'*. He also notes that even with the date being end of 7th century, *'it is a far cry from establishing the traditional account of Quranic origins, or for that matter, it's collection and editing'* [Robinson, The Ideological Uses of Early Islam, 2009, p212-214]

## Summary

- So in summary, we can see the following evidence supporting the critical role of Abd al-Malik in composing the Quran:
  - A. The earliest Quranic inscriptions occur in his reign.
  - B. The earliest Quranic manuscripts occur in his reign.

## VERIFYING WHAT IS HISTORICAL

- Historians use a number of criteria for determining whether an event that has been alleged to have occurred actually occurred. Some of these include:
  - C. Eyewitness testimony that is EARLY
  - D. Attestation by multiple sources that are INDEPENDENT of each other. If the sources are not independent, then it is just as likely that they represent ONE source repeated multiple times.
  - E. Testimony that is EMBARRASSING to the individual concerned. People do not usually make up things that make them or other important figures look inadequate or embarrassing.

### Does the al-Hajjaj version satisfy criterion of Multiple independent sources?

- As we have previously seen, the SIN Uthman story has NO eyewitnesses with the earliest 'Hadith' accounts being from the 9th century ie 200 years too late. It is also quite likely that the SIN sources are all based on al-Zuhri. So rather than being based on multiple, independent sources, they boil down to only ONE source, Al-Zuhri.
- Lawrence Conrad has identified this fallacy as '**a report generated in a particular time and place and then cited 30 times subsequently in other later texts, will be cited for all 30 attestations as if these were independent witnesses**' [Conrad, Quranic Studies, a Historian's Perspective, 2007, p15]
- In contrast there are **multiple independent** witnesses to al-Hajjaj having had a central role in the canonisation and dissemination of the Quran. This satisfies that one of the highest standards for evaluation historical evidence and makes it highly unlikely that one writer invented a particular report.
- One of these sources was the Byzantine EMPEROR, who would have been very interested in the political and religious beliefs of any rival power. He would have been very informed about major developments, especially about actions taken by prominent individuals such as the imperial viceroy al-Hajjaj.
- This means that the SIN must have LESS weight on the scales of historical veracity than the non SIN sources.
- Even if we acknowledge the problems with oral transmission of historical details seen in 'Torpedo 1' of this section, it still does not explain away all of the evidence supporting the role of Al-Hajjaj. It is highly unlikely that later writers would have simply 'invented' the story of in fact it was **really Uthman** who canonised the Quran.

### Does Al-Hajjaj Account satisfy criterion of embarrassment?

- Multiple sources paint the picture of al-Hajjaj as somewhat of a cruel and severe ruler, responsible for much persecution and killing. He was a sort of 'regime strongman'. This is not the kind of figure that you would **willingly** associate with composing your most sacred text.



- This is an example of the criterion of embarrassment. Thus, the most obvious explanation for his association with the Quran it is **actually true**
- In addition the story of al-Hajjaj is somewhat embarrassing for the figures of Umar and Uthman. If they had clearly canonised the Quran in Medina, then how and why could an outsider from Iraq come and make all these changes?

#### Could Uthman have really canonised the Quran?

- The reality is that Uthman simply did not have the power or control to accomplish what has been ascribed to him.
- Even scholars that favour the Uthmanic version eg Nicolai Sinai are forced to admit that “ *[the limited conditions of Uthman’s rule] create a strong impression that Uthman did not achieve or did not entirely achieve, the establishment of a uniform version of the Quran, but it hardly implies that he could not have tried*’ [Sinai, 2014, p288 ]. Whether or not Uthman tried is pure conjecture on Sinai’s part, but he confirms that Uthman simply did not have the means to achieve what the SIN says that he did.
- We also see that after the putting down of the rebellion of Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, Abd al-Malik had clear reason to ‘unify’ his empire which at that time was divided on religious grounds. The best way to do this was to establish a new ‘state religion’ that was an ARAB RELIGION that was connected with the state. This would ‘legitimise’ his rule and reduce likelihood of further rebellions.
- We see that this strategy was indeed successful as Abd al-Malik ruled uninterrupted for 20 years from 685-705
- ‘Accordingly, we find in Abd al-Malik’s deliberate program of Islamicising and Arabising the faith of the believers and their polity a highly credible context in which to situate the final composition and establishment of a new Islamic scripture in the Quran. Not only, then did Abd al-Malik have a clear motive for establishing such a text; he, unlike Uthman and his other earlier predecessors also had the means to enforce it” [Shoemaker, p65]
- **When one considers all the sources, it is more likely that the tradition that was invented was the one about Uthman. The traditions about al-Hajjaj most likely reflect historical fact.**

#### What do other scholars say

‘ *[There is] evidence for confusion about, lack of knowledge of and disregard for Quranic teaching in the early decades of Muslim rule in the Middle East...significant numbers of the Prophet’s community only took a real interest in his example and message long after those who knew him, or knew him best, had died*” [Tannous, Jack, The Making of the Medieval Middle East; Simple Believers and Everyday Religion 2018, p278-301,394-5 ]

Even Nicolai Sinai, who defends the Uthman hypothesis is forced to admit:

*‘The Quran may well have reached closure as early as 650 but nevertheless remained absent from Islamic history until AD700, when it was secondarily co-opted, without much revision into an existent religious tradition ‘* [Sinai, 2014,p289]

It should be noted that this statement is in a sense contradictory because;

1. according to the SIN, the whole reason for the rise of the Islamic Caliphate beginning with Muhammad was the revelation of the Quran.
2. And yet we are supposed to accept that this final and greatest divine revelation was finalised in 650 and NO ONE knew or cared enough about it to mention it for 50 years?

**This does not make sense. It is more likely that the reason that no one mentioned it until 700 was that it DID NOT EXIST until about 700.**

- ***the consonantal skeleton of the Quran remained open and fluid for three quarters of a century between the death of the Prophet and the caliphate of Abd al-Malik*** [David Powers, 'Muhammad is not the father of any of your men: the making of the last prophet, 2009, p227-33]
- ***The unanimity with which an official text is attributed to Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj, in the face of a lack of convincing evidence to the contrary, leads us to accept that the Quran we have today, at least in terms of the number and arrangement of the suras and the basic structure of the consonantal text, goes back to the time of Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj, under whose authority the official text was produced'*** [Alfred Welch, "al-Kuran", 1986 p405]
- The strength of the evidence for Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj composing the Quran is summarised very well by the following quote. Note what Shoemaker is saying:
  - F.** It is attested by multiple sources both Islamic and non-Islamic
  - G.** It is consistent with Abd al-Malik's reign and Arabisation program
  - H.** It is consistent with the Dome of the Rock, the EARLIEST archaeological evidence of the text of the Quran
  - I.** It is highly unlikely to have been invented given that al-Hajjaj was NOT someone held in universal high regard
- ***'The Quran's composition under Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj carries a high degree of historical probability. It is attested by a source very close to the event in question, 'the Letter of Leo III'. Likewise, it comports well with the Quran's near complete absence from any sources- Islamic or non-Islamic during the 7th century. The conditions of Abd al-Malik's reign, in contrast to those of his predecessors, make such an undertaking entirely feasible. The project fits very well within Abd al-Malik's program of Islamicisation and Arabisation. It corresponds with the very first witness of the text of the Quran- the inscriptions of the dome of the Rock. And it seems highly unlikely that the later collective Islamic memory would spontaneously invent such a tradition, particularly given that al-Hajjaj was a very cruel and severe ruler, whose reputation was unlikely to spark an association with this hallowed task in pious memory. As for the traditions ascribing only rather minor refinements of the Quranic text to Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj, such as diacritical marks and textual divisions, these are clearly later attempts to harmonise an earlier memory of the Quran's composition under Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj with emergent canonical Sunni traditions that would ascribe the foundation of Islam's sacred text to more esteemed figures, closer in time to Muhammad'*** [Shoemaker, Creating the Quran, p67]

## **CONCLUSION**

- When one examines the evidence from both Islamic and Non-Islamic sources, without falling victim to the bias of the SIN, one is led to the following conclusions:
  - J.** The Quran did not exist as a single volume in the 7th century. At best there were separate books or writings that were LATER incorporated into a single 'scripture'
  - K.** The SIN account of Uthman standardising the text by 652 is not factual
  - L.** The text of the what has become the Quran underwent a number of major changes in the 7th century. Al-Hajjaj was instrumental in these changes.

- M. The idea that later writers simply 'invented' a story about al-Hajjaj fails several historical criteria: multiple independent attestation and the criterion of embarrassment.
- N. The Quran was finally standardised by Al-Hajjaj under the auspices of Abd al-Malik at the end of 7th-early 8th century.
- O. This was possible because Abd al-Malik had the power and centralised control to do so, whereas his predecessors did not.
- P. This argument is also supported by the earliest inscriptional and manuscript evidence for the Quran.