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Lā yamassuhu illā 'l-muṭahharūn...
Notes on the interpretations of a Qurʾānic phrase
LĀ YAMASSUHU ILLĀ 'L-MUṬAHHARŪN... 
NOTES ON THE INTERPRETATIONS OF A QUR’ĀNIC PHRASE

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In memory of Dr. Suliman Bashear

The meaning of the phrase lā yamassuhu illā l-muṭahharūnā1 (Qur'ān 56:78–80) became the subject of a heated discussion; this is reflected in the various Qur'ānic commentaries and hadīth collections. The verses read: inna hu la-qur'ānun karīm [77] fi kitābin maknūn [78] lā yamassuhu illā l-muṭahharūn [79]. Several interpretations of the phrase and the different opinions of Muslim scholars concerning the Book referred to in this verse may give us a clue regarding the sanctity of the written version of the Qur'ān circulating in the Muslim community.

Some traditions provide information on the integrity of the text and the reliability of the scribes; others indicate that some scribes were not trained in copying the Qur'ānic text and the errors of these copyists are sometimes pointed out in the early sources. Some of the copyists were not Muslims. There are also accounts revealing differences concerning the text found in the various versions of the Qur'ān in circulation. Reports about the transmission of the Revelation to the Prophet and from him to the believers are also of interest.

I

Opinions found in the early sources concerning the meaning of the word qur'ān address questions such as whether this denotes only the heavenly

1 See different readings in Ibn Khālawayh (d. 370 AH), Mukhtāṣar fi shawādhdhi l-qur'ān min kitābī l-badī', G. Bergstraesser, ed. (Cairo, 1934), p. 151: illā l-muṭahharūn; it is understood in the sense of al-muṭaṭahharūn; al-mutharūn (which is understood as referring to angels, al-malā'īka). See also the readings and the explanations in Ḥusayn b. Abī l-'Īzz al-Hamadānī (d. 643 AH), al-Farūd fi i'tībā l-qur'ānī l-majdūd, ed. Fahmī Ḥasan al-Nimr and Fu'ād 'Alī Mukhaymir, eds. (al-Dawḥa, 1411/1991), vol. 4, p. 422.
Book or it refers also to the Qur'ānic scrolls in the Muslims' possession, and whether the heavenly Book was written by Allāh himself or it is only a reflection of his revelation.

The well known scholar 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣaḥābī (d. 211 AH) records in his Tafsīr the interpretation of Qatāda (d. 117 AH) (as transmitted by Ma'mar b. Rashīd): the phrase refers to the heavenly Book of the Qur'ān which will not be touched “in the Presence of God” (la yamassuhu 'inda llahi), meaning that the heavenly Qur'ān will not be touched except by the purified (i.e., by the angels –k), while in this world the Book is touched even by an impure Zoroastrian (al-majūsī al-najis) and by a filthy hypocrite (wu-l-munāfiq al-rajis). A clear line is thus drawn between the exalted heavenly Book which only the angels are permitted to touch and the scrolls of the Qur'ān circulating in the Muslim community, touched (among others –k) by hypocrites and unbelievers.

Similar interpretations are put forward by other exegetes. Mujāhid (d. 104 AH) explains la yamassuhu 'inda llahi saying that “the Book in heaven will be touched only by the angels.”


5Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā‘ (d. 207 AH) understands the “Book” to refer to the “Preserved Tablet” (al-lawh al-maḥfūẓ), and the ma‘rūsūl are the angels purified from polytheism (shirk).

6A clear line is thus drawn between the exalted heavenly Book which only the angels are permitted to touch and the scrolls of the Qur'ān circulating in the Muslim community, touched (among others –k) by hypocrites and unbelievers.

7Similar interpretations are put forward by other exegetes. Mujāhid (d. 104 AH) explains la yamassuhu 'inda llahi saying that “the Book in heaven will be touched only by the angels.”

it is the Preserved Tablet, guarded and hidden from His creatures, in which God put down (athbata fihi) the Qur‘ān.

The perception that “the Qur‘ān” denotes the exalted Scripture which only the angels are privileged to touch was widely circulated in orthodox circles. Al-Ājurri, one of the great scholars of the fourth century (d. 360 AH), relates that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal harshly censured those who claim that the text of the Qur‘ān in the earthly books is a narration (ḥikāya) of the contents of the Preserved Tablet. ⁸ A verse of the Qur‘ān recited in the presence of a person (or a group of persons –k) is indeed the true speech of God (kalāma lillāh), says al-Ājurri, not the narration (ḥikāyatun) of God’s Word. This utterance refers to the scrolls of the Qur‘ān (maṣūḥīf). ⁹

Other interpretations relate the phrases in our verses more closely to purely human activities. Rāghib al-İşfahānī (d. 502 AH) also interprets kitāb maknūn as al-lawh al-maḥfūz. ¹⁰ However, he records also another explanation: the word maknūn indicates that the Qur‘ān is kept in the hearts of the believers. This is closely related to the virtue of learning the Qur‘ān by heart, keeping it in memory and reciting it orally; oral transmission is considered superior to written transmission. Al-Mawardi, for his part, mentions four interpretations of al-kitāb al-maknūn: al-lawh al-maḥfūz; the taurāt and the injīl; the Psalms (zabūr); or the Qur‘ān as circulated in this world. ¹¹

Another interpretation of lā yamassuhu, which associates the required purity with humans, is quoted on the authority of al-Farra’: “Only the purified and believing will find its taste (ta’mahu) and its usefulness (nat’ahu).” ¹²

That the pure beings referred to in the verses are humans is supported by another interpretation in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s Tafsīr (given on the authority of Abū Bakr b. Ḥazm, ¹³ reported by his two sons and

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⁹Ibidem, p. 89 infra.
¹²Al-Mawardi (d. 450 AH), al-Nukat wa-l-qur‘ān (Tafsīr al-Mawardi), Khidr Muḥammad Khidr, ed., revised by ‘Abd al-Sattār Abū Ghuddā (Kuwayt, 1402/1982), vol. 4, p. 179 and traced back to al-Farra’. It is also recorded by Ibn al-ʿArabī al-Mālikī in his Aḥkām al-qur‘ān, p. 1725 and traced back to al-Farra’.
transmitted by Ma‘mar): the Prophet wrote a letter in which he stated that only a pure person would be permitted to touch the Qur’ān (lā yamasshu illā ǧāhir).

It is evident that the Qur’ānic prohibition refers to persons who are not in a state of purity and are willing to touch the Qur’ān. It indicates as well that the scrolls of the Qur’ān may be desecrated if touched by an impure person.

This is reflected in the story of ‘Umar’s conversion to Islam. While still an unbeliever, he approached his Muslim sister and her husband while they were reciting Sūrat Tāhā and asked them to show him the mushaf. They quoted the phrase lā yamasshu illā ǧumahārūn; ‘Umar understood, washed his body and embraced Islam. The fact that the story is told by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150 AH) indicates that the belief in the sanctity of the Qur’ānic scrolls was current in the Muslim community already in the second century AH.

Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Mālikī’s opinion regarding the sanctity of the copies of the Qur’ān can be deduced from an elegy mourning the Prophet’s death, attributed to Abū Bakr:

We lost the Revelation when you left us:  
and the Word of God left us (as well).  
Except that what you left for us in the past,  
transmitted from generation to generation in the noble sheets.

\[\text{[al-wāfir]}\]

\[fāqadhā l-wahya idh wallaytu ‘anā:}  
wa-wadda’anā mina llaḥi l-kalāmu.\]


Ibn al-'Arabi comments on these verses, saying that they refer to the scrolls of the Qur'an (ṣuhuf al-qur'ān) in the hands of the Muslims, dictated by the Prophet (allāhū kāna l-nabiyyuṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam yumānīhā) to his scribes. According to Ibn al-'Arabi, the ṣuhuf al-qur'ān are identical with the qarātīs mentioned in Abū Bakr’s eulogy. The scrolls of the Qur’ān are thus reproductions of the revelation granted by God to the Prophet and must be treated with proper reverence. The people of Iraq (among them Ibrāhīm al-Nakha’ī) consequently requested that only a believer in a state of purity be permitted to touch the Qur’ān.

The need to preserve the purity of the book seems to have been the reason for a number of prohibitions aimed at preventing those considered unclean from touching the Qur’ān; this probably caused Ibn 'Abbās to prevent Jews and Christians from reading the Qur’ān. The famous scholar ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salam al-Sulami (d. 360 AH) is said to have forbidden to give a copy of the Qur’ān to a Jew or a Christian for binding. It is also forbidden to leave books of ḥadīth or tafsīr in the hands of an infidel who was not expected to embrace Islam.

In his al-Bahr al-muḥīṣ, Abū Ḥayyān quotes an anonymous scholar who says that the kitāb mākūn refers to the codices of the Muslims (maṣāḥif al-muslimīn), guarded from (vicious -k) changes and alterations (maṣūna min l-tabīl wa-l-taghyīr). It is instructive that Abū Ḥayyān adds a note saying that at that time (idh dhiika), no codices (maṣāḥif) of the Qur’ān existed; this is a prediction concerning the situation in the future (ikhbārūn bi-ghayb).

Ibn al-'Arabi quotes the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfa who permitted the impure to touch the Qur’ān on its outer side and on the margins which are without script (wa-ruwīya ʿanhu annahu yamassu ẓāhirahu wa-kawāshi-yahu wa-mā la maktūba fihī). The script, on the other hand, may only be touched by the pure believer. Ibn al-'Arabi himself rejected this opinion, saying that "the precinct of the forbidden is also forbidden" (li-annā

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17 About the bayt al-qarātīs in the time of 'Uthmān, see M.M. Bravmann, The spiritual background of early Islam (Leiden, 1972), pp. 312–314; Bravmann renders the word qarātīs by rolls of papyrus (i.e. documents) on p. 312 infra.
21 Vol. 8, p. 214.
A legal opinion of Ahmad b. Hanbal mentions a case in which the believer in a state of impurity could read the Qur‘ān without touching it, being helped in reading by a stick. It is evident that we find here two different interpretations of the meaning of the word Qur‘ān: it denotes either the Holy Book in Heaven, or the text of the Qur‘ān in the possession of the believers which should not be touched by the impure, according to the injunction of the Prophet in his letter to ‘Amr b. ʿAlam. Al-Mawardi records in his Taafsīr twenty-four six interpretations for the phrase lā yamassuhu illā l-muṭahharān when referring to the text of the Qur‘ān which we hold in our hands: it can only be touched by persons purified from polytheism (shirk), from sins and faults, from ritual impurity and filth (illā l-muṭahharān mina l-aḥdāth wa-l-anjās), or only the believers in the Qur‘ān who will find the taste of its benefit, or finally — only the believers will request the Qur‘ān (lā yaltamisuhu illā l-ma’minūn). However, early scholars of Muslim law did not always agree how to preserve the required state of purity. Some Companions (Ibn ʿUmar and Ibn ʿAbbās) used to read the Qur‘ān in a state of ritual impurity after breaking wind (ḥadath), without using water for their ablution. Salman al-Fārisī used to read verses of the Qur‘ān without performing the ṣujud. The story of Salmān is recorded in a slightly different version by al-Samarqandī in his Taafsīr. Salmān came out of the privy and was

25 Reported by Ibn al-Kalbī.
26 Reported by al-Rabīʿ b. Anas.
27 Reported by Qatāda.
28 Reported by al-Farrāʿ.
29 Reported by Muʿādh b. Jabal.
asked by his companions to perform the ablution, as they wanted to ask him about some verses of the Qurʾān. Salmān quoted the tradition about the prohibition of touching the Book by an impure person; he refrained from touching it, but recited the verses of the Qurʾān which his companions had forgotten. Al-Samarqandi concludes that an impure person is forbidden to touch the Qurʾān, but may recite it.

Al-Hasan did not see anything wrong with touching the Qurʾān (al-muṣḥaf) and in carrying the Book without performing the required ablution, and al-Shaʾbī did not see any fault (kanā lā yarā baʿsan) in carrying the book of the Qurʾān (al-muṣḥaf) wrapped (bi-alāqatih) without performing the required ablution. Ibn ʿAbbās permitted a person to carry the Qurʾān while wearing a garment in which he had had sexual intercourse. Abdallah b. ʿAbbās reports that the Book touched only by the pure is the Book in Heaven. Mujāhid says that the phrase indicates that this Book is guarded from dust (al-qurʾānī fi kitābī l-maknūnī lladhī lā yamassuhu shayʿun min turābin wa-lā ghubārin).

ʿAtāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ held that a person who read the Qurʾān and noticed suddenly the smell of his breaking wind must stop reading and wait until the smell disappears.

An instructive tradition recorded by ʿAbd al-Razzāq seems to indicate that reading the Qurʾān without performing ablution after relieving oneself was a common Islamic practice. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb came out of the privy (kanif) and started to recite verses of the Qurʾān. Abū Maryam al-Ḥanāfi asked him in astonishment: “You just came out of the privy (al-khalī) and you read the Qurʾān?” ʿUmar retorted: “Is it a legal opinion given to you by Musaylima?”

A similar case is recorded in Abū Yūsuf’s (d. 182 AH) Kitāb al-āthār

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1, p. 90.
34ʿAbd al-Razzāq, al-Muṣannaf, vol. 1, p. 344, no. 1341; and see Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, ʿPaḍāʾil al-qurʾān, p. 245, (67, 4–5). I owe this rendering of ʿalāqa to Dr. Mithqāl Nāṭūr.
on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd who stated that there is nothing wrong with reading the Qur’an without performing ablution.\textsuperscript{39}

Scholars were divided in their opinion whether menstruating women and men in a state of impurity are allowed to read the Qur’an and to recite its verses; some objected to an impure believer (\textit{al-junub}) reading the Qur’an, while others permitted the reading of a small number of verses.\textsuperscript{40}

Scholars also disagree whether the impure are allowed to touch dīnār and dirhams on which Qur’anic verses are inscribed. Some held this to be strictly forbidden, while others tried to compromise, saying that people have no choice but to touch the coins.\textsuperscript{41}

Another explanation connects \textit{lā yamassuhu illā al-muṭṭahharun} to the story of the Satans who were jailed by Sulayṛan in the sea; they would come out and read to the people a Qur’an; Qur’an is rendered here as “a recitation” \textit{qir‘a‘}a.\textsuperscript{42} Al-Ṭabarī records a report on the authority of al-Dahhāk saying that the Satans strove to bring down the Qur’an from Heaven to Muhammad, but God prevented them and the Qur’an remained out of their reach.\textsuperscript{43}

Al-Ṭabarī records opinions of many Muslim scholars who glossed “the pure” as referring to the angels in heaven. He mentions, however, another explanation: “the pure” indicate those who are purified from their sins.
'Ikrima says that “the pure” were the bearers of the Torah and the Injil. An interpretation transmitted by Ibn Wahb extends the usual limits of the “pure” by including the angels, prophets and the messengers.

Al-Qurtubi comments on the phrase innahu la-qur'ānun karīmun stating that the Qur'ān is not a book of sorcery or of soothsaying; it is a book granted to the Prophet as a miracle; it is respected by the believers because it is the Word of God, as well as by the people in Heaven because it is God’s revelation. It is a Book sent down by God. This explication given by al-Qurtubī is a true example of the faḍā'il al-qur'ān genre, which was current already in the early period of Islam.

A typical example of a tradition attributed to the Prophet, emphasizing the miraculous qualities of the text of the Qur'ān was transmitted on the authority of 'Uqba b. 'Amir al-Juhani: “Were the Qur'ān wrapped in raw leather and thrown into fire, it would not burn,” (another version: “it would not be touched by fire” –k) (law kāna l-qur'ānu fi shābin thumma ulqiya fi l-nārī mā 'ḥtaraga).

A tradition transmitted by Jabir b. Zayd (died at the end of the first century of the Hijra –k) and Abū Nahīk (al-Azdī, al-Farāhīdī –k) establishes a link between the heavenly Book and the Quran in the believers’ possession; it states that the earthly Qur'ān was sent down from the Tablets of the Qur'ān in Heaven.

II

The verses discussed in the present article were used also in the controversy related to the createdness or otherwise of the Qur'ān. Regarding this issue, it was necessary to define the relationship between the heavenly book and the earthly copies of the Qur'ān. Such a definition is found in Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Rāzī’s Tafsīr. Qur’ān 7:155 reads: “And when Moses’ anger abated in him, he took the Tablets; and in the inscription of them was guidance, and mercy unto all those who hold their Lord in awe” (akhadha l-alwāhā wa-fī nuskhathiḥā hudan wa-raḥmatun li-lladhīna hum li-rabbihim yarhabūna). When commenting on this verse,

al-Rāzī stresses that the verse explicitly states *wa-fī nuskhatihā*, not *wa-fiḥā*; this indicates that this was not the original text (*awwalu maktūbin*), but merely a copy (*nuskhatun*) of the original text. The word *nushka* was used because Mūsā began to copy the contents of the broken tablets on a golden tablet (*fa-nasakha mā fiḥā fi lawhi dhahabin*) which contained (rules of -k) the Right Way (*hudān*) and of mercy. The other tablets contained details of everything (which would happen in the future —k). According to another opinion, the word *wa-fī nuskhatihā* was used because God dictated (*laqqana*) to Moses the Torah and later ordered him to write it down; Moses then transferred the Torah “from his heart” to the tablets and called it a copy (*nushka*).

It is obvious that God sent Jibrīl to the Prophet and the angel recited to him the verses of the Qur'ān as he heard them from God. Instructive is al-Rāzī’s analysis of the phrase *innahu la-qur’ānum karīmun fi kitābin maknūnin*. According to two different explanations, the word *kitāb* *makan* refers either to the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawlā al-maMuː*), or to the the written book (*muṣḥaf*) used by the believers. Al-Rāzī argues that writing down the Qur’ān does not mean that the Qur’ān dwells in the book (*wa-lā yalzamu min kitābati l-qur’ānī fi l-kitābi an yakūna l-qur’ānu ĥallān fi l-kitābi...*). By way of illustration, he explains that this is like a man who writes on the palm of his hand “a thousand dinars;” this does not mean that he holds in his hand a thousand dinārs, and thus too if one writes on the palm of one’s hand *al-‘arsh* or *al-kursī*.

Al-Rāzī further discusses whether it can be assumed that the whole Qur’ān is contained in one book, or that every compendium of the Qur’ān contains only a part of the Qur’ān and only when all the Qur’āns gathered together contain the entire text. Al-Rāzī rejects all the three options, leading to the idea that the Qur’ān is not contained in any of the books.

Al-Rāzī affirms that the Qur’ān is God’s Word; it is a pre-existent, eternal attribute of God, existing in Him and cannot be separated from Him (*bal huwa kalāmu llāhi ta’ālā, wa-kalāmuhu ʃifatun qaddīmatun qā’i-matun bihi lā tufāriqahu*).

Finally al-Rāzī deals with the expression *tanzil* and *munzal*. These two expressions could lead one to the erroneous conclusion that the revealed Qur’ān which was sent down was separate from the Essence of God; that would of course mean that the Qur’ān was created, as everything — except God — is created. But the truth is that the Qur’ān was sent down in a way which did not invalidate the concept that it is an indivisible part of the Essence of God, since it is His Word. The “sending down” of the Qur’ān was carried out in the same way as revelation was given to Moses: God taught Jibrīl the Qur’ān and he learned it by
heart. Jibril in turn taught the Qurʾan to the Prophet who then taught it to the Muslim community. 49

The problem of the status of the Qurʾan as an inseparable part of the divine essence was the subject of exhaustive discussions among Muslim scholars. “God’s Words” (al-nabī al-ummi alladhī yuʿminu bi-illāhi wakalimātihi), mentioned in Qurʾān 7:158, are understood as referring to the Qurʾān. 50 In the same way, the expression ‘ilm in Qurʾān 3:61 and 2:146 was interpreted as referring to the Qurʾān constituting a part of God’s essence. 51 Al-Ājurri mentions a specific group of believers who held that the Qurʾān is the Word of God, but refrained from stating that the Qurʾān was not created. This group was called al-waqifa and were accused of belonging to the Jahmiyya. 52

In his al-Ibiisui an usilī l-diyana, al-Ashʿari (d. 324 AH) draws a peculiar comparison between the Jahmi view that God’s Word was created and placed in a tree (or in a bush –k) and the Christian allegation that the Word of God was located in the womb of Maryam; he vigorously refutes this claim. Al-Ashʿari also rejects the Jahmiyya’s perception according to which the names of God are created; these are included in the Qurʾān; the Qurʾān is the uncreated Word of God; thus the names of God are uncreated. 53

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) gives a concise account of his credo regarding the nature of the Qurʾān. He stresses that it is the uncreated Word of God. He who denies this is to be considered an infidel (kāfir) and shedding his blood is lawful. Some curses attached by al-Ṭabarī at the end of this account are directed against those who would distort his opinions concerning the Qurʾān. 54

A comprehensive exposition of this subject is given by Ibn Ḥāzm (d. 457 AH). Of special importance is his opinion concerning the difference between the written Qurʾān and the orally transmitted Qurʾān. The first tenet challenged by Ibn Ḥāzm is the assumption that the Qurʾān

49 Al-Rāzi, Unmūdḥij jahāl fi asʿīla wa-aqībā min gharaʿib āyi l-tanzūl, Riḍwān al-Dāya, ed. (Beirut, 1411/1990), pp. 158-159 and 496-497.
50 See al-Ājurri, al-Sharf’a, a, p. 76.
51 Al-Ājurri, al-Sharf’a, a, p. 76-77. See also on pp. 77-82 the utterances of Abdallah b. al-Mubārak: “He who says that the Qurʾān was created is an infidel (kāfir);” Mālik b. Anas, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī, Wākī, Al-Jamāl b. Ḥanbal, al-Shāfiʿī and others — all repudiated the assumption that the Qurʾān was created and demanded severe punishment for those who held this belief.
52 Al-Ājurri, al-Sharf’a, a, p. 88; and see al-Khallāl, al-Musnad min masāʾil Aḥmad, MS. BL. Or. 2675, fols. 154b–158a, 179b, 180a, infra, 180s, 159a, 160b, 181b.
53 Al-Ashʿari, al-Ihāna, pp. 22-23.
was created. It was based on Qurʾān 85:21–22: *... bal huwa Qurʾānu
majīd fi lawḥin mahrūz*. This verse might mislead people to think that
the Qurʾān, having been put into the Guarded Tablet, was created af-
after the creation of the Tablet and afterwards placed in it. Whether the
Qurʾān was allegedly created simultaneously with the Tablet, or put into
the Tablet after its creation, one might erroneously conclude that it was
created by God. But the truth is, according to Ibn Ḥazm, that the
Qurʾān, the everlasting Word of God, was not put into the Tablet after
God created it. The Tablet contains merely a written reproduction of
the Qurʾān, not the Qurʾān itself.

Ibn Ḥazm affirms that God created the Tablet, but the Tablet con-
tains only writing which cannot be heard (*lā yuḥṣū ʿillā bi-rasmin mak-
tūbin fihī, ghayrī masnūʿin*), while the Qurʾān is God’s Word, voiced
(*masnūʿ*), which cannot be seen (*lā yurā*). Conversely, the writing in the
Tablet can be seen, but cannot be heard until read aloud and brought
to the knowledge (of the people –κ). The written script in the Tablet
constitutes an exposition of God’s Word (*fa-lladhi fi-l-lawḥī khaṭṭun
marsūmin*, *ibāratan ʿan kalāmī llāhi ʿazza wa-jalla*).

Ibn Ḥazm also observes that the Guarded Tablet is of limited size;
were it true that the Qurʾān is included in the Guarded Tablet, it must
be smaller than the Tablet. This is however impossible, as God assured
the Prophet about the endless dimensions of the book in Qurʾān 18:110
and 31:28.

Ibn Ḥazm concludes that the Word of God will not be exhausted, it
has neither beginning nor end; thus it cannot be contained in the Tablet
which has finite dimensions. The Word of God, like His other attributes
will last forever; what is in the Guarded Tablet is just a script (*fa-lladhi
fi-l-lawḥī inna ma huwa khaṭṭun maktūbun*).

Ibn Ḥazm’s opinion relates to God’s Word in the *maṣāḥif*: God is
indeed mentioned in the Qurʾānic compendia, circulating among the
believers, pronounced with their tongues, but He does not reside in
their compendia (*wa-huwa, ʿazza wa-jalla, ghayru ħālin wa-lā dākhilin
fi maṣāḥifinā*). He is seated on His throne, He is omniscient, His Word
has been written down on the Tablet. His Word is heard, but not seen;
Moses and Adam heard His Words; the Prophet heard His Words on his
nocturnal journey (*isrāʾ*).55

In another passage, Ibn Ḥazm lists among the books of revelation con-
taining divine speech the Torah, the Gospel (*injīl*), the Psalms (*zabūr*
and the scrolls (*ṣuhuf*) (the sheets on which God’s Revelation was re-
corded –κ); all of these are also the Words of God and no one in the

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Muslim community would contradict it. Materials which help to convey God’s Word to his creation, such as parchment, ink, as well as the voice of those who recite the Qurʾān or the other scriptures — all these are created by God but are not identical with the uncreated Word of God.\(^{56}\)

ʿAbd al-Qādīr al-Jilānī (d. 561 AH) reiterates a part of al-Ṭabarī’s credo quoted above. He maintains that even the expression “My recitation of the Qurʾān is created” (lafẓ bi-l-qurʾān makhliiq) must be renounced and the person who uttered it must be severely punished. The letters of the Arabic alphabet were also not created by God; they are a part of His Essence. He who says that these letters are created (muḥdattha or makhliqa) is an infidel (kafir), and is guilty of transforming the Qurʾān into a created Book.\(^{57}\)

Some scholars in the later period of Islam compiled special treatises concerning the problem of the Qurʾān as a part of God’s Essence. These treatises are of a popular character and are widely circulated in the Muslim community. Two of the authors of these treatises may be mentioned. Muwaffaq al-Dīn ʿAbdallah b. Aḥmad b. Qudāma al-Maqdisī (d. 620 AH),\(^{58}\) and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Maqdisī (d. 643 AH), who thoroughly analyzed a widely circulating tradition, transmitted by several Companions of the Prophet in which the idea of the Qurʾān as a part of the Essence of God was especially emphasized: “From Him it began and to Him it will return.”\(^{59}\)

III

There were contradictory opinions as to the problem of selling and buying written copies of the Qurʾān (masāḥif). Some scholars disapproved of both buying or selling the books of the Qurʾān, while others opposed only selling Qurʾāns, for it is not right to make a profit from God’s Book.\(^{60}\)


\(^{57}\)Abd al-Qādīr al-Jilānī, al-Ghunya li-tfarī ibti ḥaqq (Cairo, 1322), vol. 1, pp. 65–67.

\(^{58}\)Al-Iṣṣāq, ʿAdil ʿAbd al-Munʿīm Abū l-ʿAbbās, ed. (Cairo, 1990), pp. 36–39.


The chapter concerning the selling and buying of *maṣāḥif* in Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī’s *al-Maṣāḥif* contains some peculiar traditions which reflect uncommon opinions concerning the purchase of scrolls of the Qur’an. Al-Sha’bī (d. 109 AH) argued that people selling copies of the Qur’an merely sell the sheets (of paper, or the parchment –κ), and get paid for their labour (of writing the text –κ) (*wa-llahi mi-yabfiina kitāba llāhi, innamā yabi’ūna l-waraqa wa-‘amala ‘aydhihim*).\(^1\) It is noteworthy that the assumption that the books of the Qur’an contain only the ink and the sheets (of the paper or parchment –κ), exposed above by al-Sha’bī and other respected scholars, was sharply censured by some orthodox scholars as belonging to the Mu’tazila.\(^2\)

The problem of writing *maṣāḥif* for sale was dealt with by the well known *faqīh* ‘Īzz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulāmī.\(^3\) He was asked whether a man who professionally copies the text of the Qur’an and sells the written books may be considered to be performing a lawful work, or whether he should refrain from this work out of piety (*wara’*). Likewise, may he pursue this profession if he finds it difficult to observe ritual purity during the copying of the Qur’ānic text; in this case, is he allowed to write it while ritually impure?

‘Īzz al-Dīn states in his legal opinion that it is lawful to gain profit from copying the Qur’an, and that there is no piety (*wara’*) in giving up this occupation. It is even a laudable profession because it encourages the person to repeat the text continuously (*istidhkar al-qur’ān*). Such a person must, however, observe the conditions of ritual purity while writing the text of the Qur’an.

‘Īzz al-Dīn was also asked concerning a scribe who made some mistakes while copying the Qur’an: some people reading this text might accuse the scribe of perpetrating a sin. What is the status of the copied text? ‘Īzz al-Dīn rules that if the copyist is a learned man, he has to correct the mistakes; if he does not know how to fix the text properly

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\(^3\) *Kitāb al-fatāwā*, p. 147, no. 106.
(lā ya‘rifu ẓāhira l-qur‘āni), he should refrain from working as a scribe, because he may lead the ignorant astray. On the other hand, there is a prophetic tradition stating that if a believer reads the Qur‘ān distorting the text, or erring in his reading, the angel will put it down exactly as it was revealed. In a similar vein, a non-Arab who mispronounces some words in the Qur‘ān will be granted a reward as if he had read them correctly. This indicates that some non-Arabs who embraced Islam used to pronounce the Qur‘ānic text incorrectly.

In the early period of Islam, the believers seem to have been reluctant to pay professional scribes for copying the Qur‘ān. They doubted their sincerity, faith and knowledge. Many anecdotes circulate concerning warnings issued by the pious as to the knowledge which is required of the copyist in Arabic, in matters of abrogation (naskh) and in the various readings of the Qur‘ān.

In the first period of Islam, the believers did not buy copies of the Qur‘ān (maṣāḥif); they used to ask their acquaintances, people of piety and virtue, to copy out some parts of the Qur‘ān; sometimes people used to gather and write the text of the Qur‘ān together. It was a collectively written text, accomplished out of expectation of divine reward (kānū yaḥtasibūna bi-maṣāḥifihim).

It seems that the use of professional scribes became prevalent at the end of the first century AH. One of the respected scholars who decided to make his living by copying the Qur‘ān with the approval of the Muslim community was Mālik b. Dīnār. Another person who became a professional scribe was Maṭār al-Warrāq.
Abrogated verses of the Qur’ān were sometimes circulated and transmitted by scholars.1 Such was for instance the case of an abrogated verse defining the aim of the money donated for performing prayer and paying zakāt.2 Another verse remembered by the believers despite its abrogation was a verse revealed during the expedition of Bi’r Ma’ūna, concerning the readers of the Qur’ān (al-qurra’) killed in this battle: “Let our people know that we met our Lord” (ballighu ‘annā qawmanā annā laqīnā rabbanā).3

A verse of legal character not included in the text of the Qur’ān was transmitted by ‘Umar: “An old man and woman, if they fornicate, definitely stone them” al-shaykhū wa-l-shaykhātū idhā zanayā fa-rjumūhumā al-battata.4

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4Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Faḍāʾīlu l-qurʿān, p. 136; al-Ḥārīth al-Muḥāsibī, al-ʿAql wa-fahmu l-qurʿān, p. 398; al-Suyūṭī, al-Īṭān, vol. 2, p. 26. Another story transmitted by ʿUmar relates that he approached the Prophet when the verse was revealed and asked him to include it in the Qur’ān. The Prophet, however, disliked the idea. See the conversation of ʿUmar with God about the difference of punishment for fornication met out to the old in contradistinction to the punishment imposed on the young. This verse was transmitted by ʿUmar in a slightly extended form: al-shaykhū wa-l-shaykhātū idhā zanayā fa-rjumūhumā al-battata nakālān mina ilāḥī wa-ilāḥī shadīdū l-ṭiqābī. ʿUmar is said to have refrained from including the verse in the Qur’ān, fearing that he would be accused of falsely inserting the verse into the book. See al-Raghib al-Iṣḥāqī, Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ (Beirut, 1961), vols. 3–4, pp. 433 ult.–434, l. 1: Yaʾqūb b. Sufyān al-Ṯasawī (= al-Basawī), al-Maʾrifa wa-l-tārīkh, ʿAkrām Diyāʾ al-ʿUmarī, ed. (Beirut, 1401/1981), vol. 2, p. 728; al-Suyūṭī, al-Īṭān, vol. 2, p. 26; Hossein Modarressi, “Early debates on the integrity of the Qur’ān: a
A peculiar story about the disappearance of this verse as well as of a verse concerning the suckling of an old man is reported on the authority of 'A'isha. According to this story, the verse ordering the stoning of a fornicator and the verse concerning the suckling of an adult were sent down and were kept under 'A'isha's bedstead on a parchment. When the Prophet once fell ill and was being taken care of, a domestic animal entered 'A'isha's home and ate the parchment containing the two verses.

A tradition reported by Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām and traced back to 'A'isha says that the verse concerning the punishment for fornication was included in Sūrat al-aḥzāb, which originally contained the same number of verses as Sūrat al-baqara. The verses of Sūrat al-aḥzāb were however reduced to 73 and the verse concerning the fornication was “lifted” (ruf'at, i.e., it was abrogated -k) and was not included in the muṣḥaf. Thus, according to the statement of 'A'isha, God lifted to Himself several verses reducing the number of the verses of Sūrat al-aḥzāb to 73. Al-Qurtubi, however, denies that the verse concerning the punishment of fornication was recorded on a sheet (ṣahifah) in the home of 'A'isha and was devouried by a domestic animal; he holds that this story was invented by the Shi'is (rawāfīd) and the heretics (malāḥid).

The verse concerning fornication and its punishment is indeed recorded in al-Suyūṭī's al-Durr al-mamnūr. According to a tradition traced to Ibn 'Abbās, 'Umar is said to have summoned the believers to attend a gathering in the mosque, ascended the minbar and told the believers that the fornication verse was revealed to the Prophet and read by the believers, but had “gone” with the Prophet together with many other verses of the Qur'ān. It is, however, a convincing proof of the validity of stoning for fornication. The Prophet laid down the punishment of stoning in that case, as did Abu Bakr; but there would come (in later generations -k) people who would...
say that punishment by stoning was a lie and an invention. Some well known scholars argued that stoning of fornicators was not mentioned in the Qur'ān, and was merely a rule commonly accepted by the Muslim community.

Ubayy b. Ka'b held that the following verses were part of the Qur'ān (ubayy b. ka'b qaḍa: kunnā narā ħādhā mina l-qur'āni: law anna li-bni ādama wādiyayni min mālin la-tamannā wādiyan ḥāliθan. lā yamla'u jaufa bni ādama illā l-turūhū, thummna yatābū llāhu 'alā man ūba). Ubayy b. Ka'b said: “We considered that (i.e., the following sentences –k) as being a part of the Qur'ān: “If a man had two valleys of goods, he would desire a third valley; the interior of the man will not be filled except by dust; then God will restore the man who repented to His grace.”

Ubayy added: “This was the practice of reading these verses (including the verse alḥākum al-takāthuru) until Sūra 102 was revealed.”

Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī said that a Sūra the length of Sūrat al-barā'ah was revealed to the Prophet, but was later abrogated (fa-rauf'a). Abū Mūsā remembered only one verse of this Sūra: “God will aid this religion by means of people who have no share (in Paradise)” (innā llāha łyu'yayyidū ħādhā l-dīna bi-aqwāmin lā khalāqa lahum...). A prediction of similar content is sometimes described as a ḥadīth rather than as a Qur'ānic verse. ‘Umar reported a saying in which the Prophet he predicted that the Christian nomads of the tribe of Rabī‘a, dwelling on

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10Al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-maθthūr, vol. 6, p. 387. This verse was included in the version of the Qur'ān transmitted by ‘Abdallāh b. Maṣ‘ūd; see al-Rāghib al-Iṣḥābānī, Muḥādārat al-adabār (Beirut, 1961), vols. 3–4, pp. 433–434; al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-maθthūr, vol. 1, p. 105 infra. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārīmī (d. 255 AH) records in his Sunan, Muhammad Aḥmad Dāhḥān, ed. (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 318–319, the verse as transmitted by Qatādā on the authority of Anās (b. Mālik –k). Anās, the Companion of the Prophet, records the verse uttered by the Prophet with a remarkable reservation: “I do not know whether it was a verse (of the Qur'ān –k) sent down to him or was it his saying as he said it,” (fa-lā ʿadī a-shay‘un unzila ʿalayhi am shay‘un yaqūluwa wa-huwa yaqūlu...). The opinion of Anās casting doubt on whether the utterance was a saying of the Prophet or an abrogated verse of the Qur'ān is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās in Abū ‘Ubayd’s Paḍā‘id, p. 192, nos. 51–9. The utterance about the valleys coveted by man is preceded by the prediction of the Prophet: innā llāha łyu'yayyidū ħādhā l-dīna bi-aqwāmin lā khalāqa lahum. And cf. this verse of the abrogated Sūra about the wicked people coupled with the saying about the man who covets the third valley: Abū l-Maḥāsin Yūsuf b. Mūsā al-Ḥanafi, al-Muṭāṣar min al-mukhtaṣar min muskhliθ l-āθār (Ḥaydarābād, 1362), vol. 2, p. 163 infra; al-Muḥāṣibī, al-ʾAṣār wa-fahmu l-qur‘āni, p. 405.
11Nūr-al-Dīn al-Ḥaythamī, Majma‘ al-zawwādīd wa-maθba‘ al-fawādīd (Beirut, 1967), vol. 5, p. 302. The chapter in which the report of Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī is recorded contains several utterances of the Prophet predicting that Islam will be aided by wicked people. A peculiar utterance attributed to the Prophet says that “the stock of my people are the wicked” (qiwām ummaθiθ shīrāruhā).
the shores of the Euphrates, will assist the cause of Islam, and therefore refrained from killing them. This was, of course, a justification of the political decision to grant the Arab Christians a special status in the Muslim polity of the Arabian peninsula.12

A tradition transmitted by Abū Umāma supplies a vivid description of how certain Sūras of the Qurʾān were suddenly abrogated. Some believers memorized a Sūra of the Qurʾān. One morning they got up and were unable to recite even one verse of the Sūra. They came to the Prophet and complained that they had forgotten the Sūra. The Prophet calmed them by saying that the Sūra had been abrogated during the night.13 Several cases of abrogated verses are mentioned in adab collections, in zuhd literature and in works of tafsīr.14

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There were considerable differences in the reading of words in the Qurʾān. ‘A’isha read in Qurʾān 4:117: in yadʿūna min dānīhi illā awthānān, instead of the usual reading: in yadʿūna min dānīhi ināthān. Another reading attributed to ‘A’isha is in yadʿūna min dānīhi illā untūhā.15

The verb wa-qāḍā in the phrase wa-qāḍā raḥbūkā an lā toʾbudū illā ʿiyāḥu of Qurʾān 17:23, was glossed by amara. Several commentators considered the reading wa-qāḍā an error; the scribe had erred and read the word wa-qāḍā because a wa was seen as attached to the sa and


14See e.g., al-Fasawī, al-Maʿrija wa-l-taʾrikh, vol. 2, p. 727 and p. 262; al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, al-ʿAql wa-fahmu l-qurʿān, pp. 359–475; al-Ṭabarānī, al-Muʾjam al-kabīr, Ḥanīfī. Ṣāḥib al-Majīd al-Salafī, ed. (n.p., 1400/1980), vol. 11, pp. 268–269, nos. 9148–9152; see the opinion of Ibn Ṣāḥib about the two last Sūras, the muʾawwidiḥalatān: . . . an abdī llāhī annahu kāna yāḥṣuktu l-muʾawwidiḥalatān mi l-nasāḥīf wa-yaqūlu: innamā amara rasūla llāhi ṣallā llāhuʾalayhi wa-sallālām an yuṭaʾawwada bhiḥmā wa-lam yakūn yaqrʿuʾu biḥimā. Ibn Ṣāḥib stated that the two Sūras were deliberately inserted into the Qurʾān but they do not belong to it.

erroneously read wa-qaḍā. The proper reading should be read wa-ваṣṣā rabbuka.16

Shahr b. Ḥawshab transmitted a peculiar reading of Quran 106:1–2: waylu ummikum qurayshu riḥlata l-shita‘i wa-l-ṣayfi instead of the common li-ṭāfī qurayshin ʿilāfihih riḥlata al-shita‘i wa-l-ṣayfi.17

The issue of the reading of Quran 20:63 is well known. ‘Ā’isha read the phrase in ḥādhāni la-sāhibi‘n in contrast to other readers, who tried to comply with certain grammatical rules. ‘Ā’isha was aware that it was a lahn of the Bedouins, or a mistake of the scribe, but it could be hoped that the Arabs would improve the reading in the future.18

The Quran was highly respected and the writing of the text, learning it by heart, reciting verses in public prayers — all these were laudable deeds characterizing people of distinction and piety. “Those who carry the Quran in their memory (ḥamalatu l-qur’ān) are the nobility of my people,” was an utterance of the Prophet transmitted by Ibn ‘Abbās.19

Another prophetic saying states that reading the Quran fills the body of the believer with prophecy, even though he was not granted revelation.20 When a man enters the room with a copy of the Quran, those present must stand up; this is out of respect for the Quran which is thus honoured, in the same way as one honours a learned man.21

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Worn out copies of the Qur'an were carefully collected and respectfully disposed of. Scholars discussed at length the proper ways for their disposal.\textsuperscript{22}

An item discussed by early scholars of Islam was the loud recitation of the prescribed parts of the Qur'an during the obligatory prayers in the mosque. A report recorded by 'Abdallah b. Abî Zayd al-Qayrawânî in his Kitâb al-jâmî' says that in the “old time” people were not used to listening to the recitation of the Qur'an from a book. Mâlik (b. Anas) disapproved of such recitation. It was introduced by al-Ḥajjâj.\textsuperscript{23}

According to early traditions, people disliked to be led in their prayer by an imâm who read the Qur'an from a musâḥaf; this was seen as adopting customs of the People of the Book. Some scholars indeed quoted the hadîth: lâ tashabbahu bi-ahli l-kitâb in connection with the reading of the Qur'an from a musâḥaf by the imâm during the canonical prayer.\textsuperscript{24}

Furthermore, the Prophet enjoined that the Qur'ân be read with the tunes of the Arabs, not with the tunes of the libertines (ahl al-fisq); time would come, after the death of the Prophet, that people would read the Qur'an with tunes of the monks, with voices of weeping or lamentation. Their hearts would go astray and this would be the lot of their adherents as well.\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{25}Al-Fasawî, al-Ma'rîfa wa-l-ta'rikh, vol. 2, p. 480; al-Qurtûbî, al-Tidhkâr fi asâlî bi l-adkhâr, p. 117.
On the other hand, dictating the Qur’an from memory to be written down in the *mašāḥif* was a rare case. It was the Companion Ibn Mas‘ūd, a man with an outstanding knowledge of the Qur’an, who used to dictate the *mašāḥif* from memory. Believers were enjoined not to read the Qur’an to the people of the *mašāḥif*, and not to gain knowledge from the ṣaḥāfiyyūn, the people of the sheets (i.e., people using written compendia, or compilations of the ḥadīth). 

Christian copyists of the Qur’an

In contrast to the injunctions according to which one should restrict learning, memorizing and writing the *mašāḥif* to the orthodox and the pious, the leaders of the Muslim community were forced in many cases to resort to non-Muslims in order to spread the religious ideas of the Muslim faith.

A profound change in the Muslim community occurred a very short time after the death of the Prophet. This is indicated in a report of ‘Amr b. Murra: *kāna fi awwali l-zamānī yajtami‘ūna fa-yaktubūn a-l-mašāḥifā thuamma innahum kasaalu wa-zahidū fi l-ajri fa-‘sta’jarū l-‘ibāda fa-katabūhā lahum.* These Christian ‘ibād from the region of al-Ḥira were the first to sell the *mašāḥif*, according to a report by al-Sijistānī, and some details about them have been preserved in the tradition. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf, the Companion of the Prophet, asked a Christian from al-Ḥira to copy out the Qur’an for him and paid him sixty dirhams. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā paid a man from al-Ḥira seventy dirhams for a *mushaf* copied for him.

Several details in the early sources confirm the reports concerning the activity of the ‘ibād and other Christians in copying the *mašāḥif*. Abū ‘Ubayd records in his *Faḍā’il al-qur’ān* a report saying that Alqama entrusted a Christian with copying a *mushaf* for him. ʿAbd al-Razzāq records the report mentioned above, saying that a Christian from al-Ḥira wrote a *mushaf* for ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān

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26Ibn Abī Dawūd al-Sijistānī, al-Mašāḥif, p. 137.
28Ibn Abī Dawūd, al-Mašāḥif, p. 171, infra.
29Ibid., p. 133.
31See above, note 28.
paid him seventy dirhams for his work.\textsuperscript{32}

The role of the Christian ‘\textit{‘ibād} in copying the Qurān in early Islam seems to have been known in the Muslim community. It seems that there were such cases even in the third century AH. This can be deduced from the response of ‘Āḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH) who was asked by a man whether it was true that Christians copied the texts of the Qurān. ‘Āḥmad affirmed that the Christians of al-Ḥira used to write the \textit{maṣāḥif}; they did so because there were few others who could perform this task.\textsuperscript{33}

‘Āḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s answer serves as a clear indication that Christians (and especially the ‘Ībād of al-Ḥira –k) played an important role in early Islam by copying the Qurān for the orthodox believers, who had no reservations whatsoever to accept their services. Non-Muslims contributed a great deal to the dissemination of Islam in this initial period.

The fact that the Christian ‘\textit{‘ibād} were employed in the very early period of Islam in copying the Qurān seems to have brought about some changes in the Muslim community’s perception of the sacredness of the material on which the \textit{maṣāḥif} were written, of the accuracy of the copied text, and of the liberty to introduce some changes which the transmitter was said to have heard from the Prophet. The text itself, in spite of the officially established version of ‘Uṯmān, was not certain and was not recognized by the community’s consensus; this was already pointed out by Goldziher.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{33}See Sulaymān Bashir, \textit{Muqaddima fi l-laʾrikhī l-ākhār} (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 74, note 23; Bashir quotes the utterance of ‘Āḥmad b. Ḥanbal from the MS Zāhirīyya, majmūʿ 83. He was the first to publish a reference from this MS, which was recently edited. See Ābu ʾl-Qāsim al-Baḥāwī (al-rāwī –k), \textit{Masāʿil ʿĀḥmad b. Ḥanbal}, ‘Amr ʾAbd al-Munʿim Saḥm, ed. (Cairo, 1413/1993), p. 47, no. 10.

'A'isha and 'Uthmān had a very mild opinion concerning the mistakes in the Qurʾān, stating that these mistakes would be corrected in the future by the believing Arabs with their tongues.\(^{35}\)

Abū l-Aswad al-Du‘ālī, when asked about the questionable form of the phrase mā hādhā basharun in Qurʾān 12:31, answered that this form (“basharun”) instead of “basharan”) is a scribal mistake.\(^{36}\)

Zayd b. Thābit inserted the verse la-qad jāʿakum rasūlun min an-fusikum (Qurʾān 9:128) and the following verse into the text of the Qurʾān on the authority of Khuzayma b. Thābit, who kept these two verses in memory.\(^{37}\) Zayd b. Thābit did listen to the Prophet’s reading of the verse min al-muʿminīna rijālun ṣadaqū mā ʿāhadū lāhā ʿalayhi. The verse was lost and Zayd b. Thābit was glad to find that Khuzayma b. Thābit had preserved it, and he inserted it in its proper place (Qurʾān 33:23).\(^{38}\)

The tradition attributed to the Prophet, saying that the Qurʾān wrapped in leather would not burn if thrown into the fire\(^ {39}\) was given a new interpretation: the leather in which the text of the Qurʾān was wrapped and the ink will be burnt, but the Qurʾān (i.e., the text in the mushaf) will be taken back to God.\(^ {40}\)

The idea of the glorious Qurʾān as a part of God’s Essence, and the miraculous revelation of its verses transmitted by the angel Jibril to the Prophet when he was alone in the cave, were placed side by side with traditions emphasizing the simplicity of the Prophet’s life, his suffering during his prophetic activity in Mecca, his persecution by the members of his tribe, the hardships he had to endure and the ascetic and devoted character of his everyday activities, which conformed with the tenets of the Qurʾān. ‘A’isha could rightly state that his character was according to the tenets and injunctions of the Qurʾān.\(^ {41}\)


\(^{39}\)See note 49 above.

\(^{40}\)See Ibn Qutayba, Taʾwil mushtākīf al-ḥadīth, pp. 252–254.

In the period of the prophetic activity in Medina, the Prophet's revelation was transmitted to a growing number of his Companions who circulated it among their relatives and also disseminated details about the Prophet's righteous way of life, his kindness towards his Companions and his noble attitude towards his opponents; all this formed the sunna of the Prophet. The help he gave to his wives and his respect for them was stressed in the early tradition. 'A'isha could state with pride that she was the only woman from among the wives of the Prophet who was granted the honour and the privilege that the Prophet received the revelation in her presence, while both were covered by the same blanket.\(^{42}\)

Ibn Qutayba, the well known scholar of the Qur’an, tried to bridge the gap between the two perceptions of sanctity, the glorious and holy book of the Qur’an and the sheet of the Holy Book devoured by a domestic animal. In a lengthy passage, Ibn Qutayba gives a description of the social and economic situation of the Prophet in Medina. The Qur’an was at that time written on palm branches, soft white stones and dry skins. The verses of the Qur’an were not collected in a book; the texts written on these coarse materials merely circulated among the believers. Even the letters of the Prophet sent to the kings were written on animals’ skins.\(^{43}\)

People at that time had no cupboards (khazii’in) or locked ebony chests; when they wanted to deposit anything (of value -k) they put it under the bedstead in order to guard it from being harmed by children or animals. The Prophet used to patch his garments, because of poverty, to repair his sandals and his boots. The Prophet stated about himself that he feels like a servant, eating like a servant sitting on the floor. Other prophets lived like poor people, eating barley-bread and wearing woolen garments.

Ibn Qutayba mentions various explanations why Allah allowed verses of the Qur’an to be eaten by the ewe; it may be that it was a revelation which had to be carried out, but not necessarily be put down in the text of the Qur’an. The phrase lā ya’tīhi l-baṭīlū min bayni yadayhi wa-lā


\(^{43}\)See e.g., the report of a letter sent by the Prophet to the people of ‘Umān in Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Manda, Juz’ fihi man ‘āsha mi’ātan wa-‘ishrīna sarna mina l-ṣaḥāba, Mashhūr Ḥasan Salmān, ed. (Beirut, 1412/1992), p. 84: jā‘anā kitābū l-nabīyyīn sa’īlā lāhīz ‘alayhi wa-sallām fi qif’atīn min adīm.
min khalfihī does not mean that the sheets would not be injured by some mishap. The phrase in fact implies that Satan will not be able to insert into the Qur'ān words which were not in the text before or after the revelation.

Some details about the writing (or rather: the copying -k) of the Qur'ānic text by a mawla and the changes introduced into the text by 'A'īsha, are recorded in some ḥadīth collections. 'A'īsha is said to have ordered her mawla, Abū Yūnus, to write for her a muṣḥaf; she asked him, however, to inform her when he would reach the phrase ḥafīzū 'alā l-ṣalawātī wa-l-ṣalātī l-wuṣṭā (Qur'ān 2:238). When the mawla reached this phrase, 'A'īsha dictated a different version of the phrase to him. Tradition records two versions of the change introduced by 'A'īsha: ḥafīzū 'alā l-ṣalawātī wa-l-ṣalātī l-wuṣṭā wa ṣalātī l-ʿaṣrī, and ḥafīzū 'alā l-ṣalawātī wa-l-ṣalātī l-wuṣṭā ṣalātī l-ʿaṣrī. The reading of 'A'īsha constituted a substantial deviation from the accepted version established by 'Uthmān.

There is a tradition according to which Ḥafṣa, the daughter of 'Umar, ordered the mawla of 'Umar, 'Amr b. Rāfī', to copy a muṣḥaf for her. When he reached the verse mentioned above, she ordered him to insert her reading: ḥafīzū 'alā l-ṣalawātī wa-l-ṣalātī l-wuṣṭā ṣalātī l-ʿaṣrī.

The scholars differed as to the meaning of the ṣalāt al-wuṣṭā: this could refer to ṣalāt al-ṣuhb, ṣalāt al-zuhr, ṣalāt al-ʿaṣr, or even to ṣalāt al-fajr.

The tradition of Ḥafṣa, who also entrusted the copying of the Qur'ān to a mawla, may imply that the two servants were youths captured during a military expedition, who were familiar with the Arabic script and were presented as servants to 'A'īsha and Ḥafṣa. They may have been Christians.

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44 Qur'ān 41:43.
45 Ibn Qutayba, Kitāb taʿwil mubahalāfī l-ḥadīth (Cairo, 1326), pp. 397–404.
47 See Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandi, Ṭafsīr, vol. 1, p. 213 infra; and see ibidem, the tradition saying that some people stated that that was the reading of ‘Abdallah b. Masʿūd.